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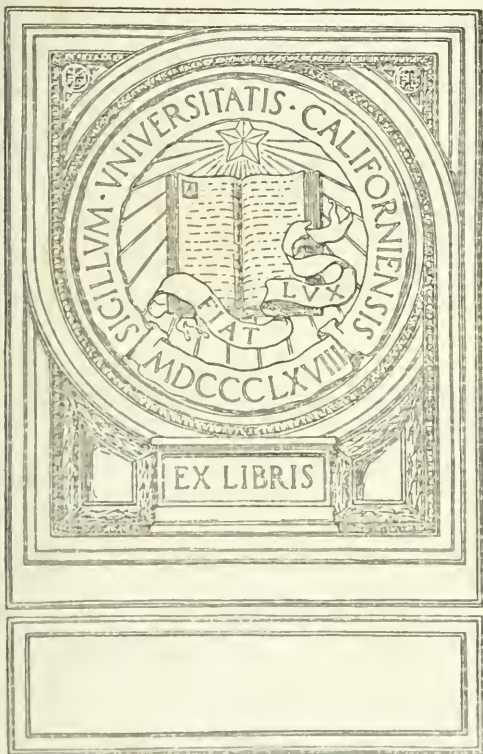
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HERBERT LACY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF GRANBY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

La morale est la science des sciences à ne la considérer que sous le rapport du calcul; et il y a toujours des limites à l'esprit de ceux qui n'ont pas senti l'harmonie de la nature des choses avec les devoirs de l'homme.

MADAME DE STAEL.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1828.

1890-1891
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HERBERT LACY.

CHAPTER I.

Conspiracies no sooner should be formed
Than executed.

ADDISON...*Cato*.

ANY observant person who had studied the looks and manner of Agnes and Lacy during the visit which has been above described, would have come to the conclusion that an attachment subsisted between them. No wonder, then, that such fact should have been rendered as clear to the quick comprehension of Sackville as if it had been avowed to him by the parties them-

selves. He saw that they were attached; and saw it with surprise, displeasure, and dismay. He saw it with surprise, because he knew that only a few weeks before they had been total strangers, strangers who had no desire to become acquainted, and whose impressions of each other were, if any thing, unfavourable. He saw it with displeasure, because it promised to interfere with a project which, of all others, he had most at heart—that of uniting himself with Agnes Morton. The motives which inclined him to this were various: but their result was a determination of the most firm and unalterable kind. He loved her as much as it was in his nature to love any one: he admired her beauty, and could appreciate the extent of her capacity, and the excellence of her disposition. By these she was strongly recommended to his choice; but perhaps not more strongly than by the circumstance of her inheriting a fortune of eighty thousand pounds.

Other causes also contributed to strengthen

his resolution. Being nearly related to the husband of Miss Morton's aunt, he had passed much of his time with them, and, after the death of Mr. Denham, obtained a strong influence over his widow, and became her counsellor and assistant in the direction of her affairs. This influence he was too careful of public opinion to abuse to any very obvious extent; and he allowed her, after leaving her landed property and a handsome legacy to him, to bequeath the greater part of her fortune to Agnes, her adopted niece. But he did not do this without having his recompense in view. He was struck by the budding graces of the little girl; and trusting that she would be no less charming as she advanced to womanhood, internally resolved to remunerate himself for his present disinterestedness, by making the young heiress at some future time his wife. For this purpose he contrived that her fortune should be placed in the hands of two trustees, himself, and a Mr. Hawkesworth, an elderly man of great respectability,

but whose timidity of character put him completely under the control of Sackville. He also contrived that she should be debarred from marrying, under pain of forfeiture, before the age of twenty-four, without the consent of her trustees, and that meanwhile the greater part of her fortune, instead of being appropriated to supporting the extravagance of her father, should be allowed to accumulate in their hands.

Such were his plans for the attainment of an object which, having once determined to be desirable, he now, with that stern inflexibility of purpose which belonged to his character, steadily resolved to carry. Hitherto he had been slow and cautious in his operations, and had endeavoured to effect his object in attempting to awaken, by a course of the most unobtrusive and delicate attentions, some sentiment of attachment in the bosom of his young ward. In this, he now found that he had utterly failed, and all hopes from such a course must be at once abandoned. She was even attached to

another ; to one whom her parents would approve, who returned her love, who might even within a few hours declare his passion, and be accepted. The case was urgent and admitted of no delay.

But Sackville did not despair. He knew his resources, and was confident in his address. He knew that the blow he meditated, to be effectual, must be speedy ; and, before he closed his eyes, that very night, he had devised a plan of operations which were to be carried into effect on the morrow. Next morning, soon after breakfast, he rode over to Lacy Park, where he passed a long time in lively conversation with Sir William, and that friend, whose happiness he was then plotting to destroy. The ostensible object of his visit was to show to Herbert a letter from a common friend of theirs, then abroad, in which he was mentioned. His real object was to ascertain whether he intended to call that day at Dodswell ; and, if he did, to return with him, and to contrive, if possible,

that he should have no opportunity of then making his proposal either to Agnes or to Mr. Morton. Happily for Sackville, Herbert was found to have no such intention ; for he had been schooled into forbearance by the injunctions of his father, and was comforted with the reflection that, at all events, he should again meet Agnes at the Westcourt ball on the following Wednesday.

Satisfied on this point, Sackville quitted the Lacys and returned to Dodswell shortly before dinner. At table he frankly detailed his proceedings, talked a good deal about the Lacys, and in a manner rather favourable to them, and spoke in terms of high regard for Herbert.

“ I like him very much,” said he, in a tone of perfect ease and sincerity ; “ and I think Miss Hartley is very fortunate in her prospects—if I may venture to say such a thing—for you know,” he added, turning with a smile to Agnes, “ in cases of matrimony, the good fortune is always presumed to be on our side.”

Agnes mechanically assented, scarcely knowing what she said: for this startling intelligence had been so suddenly and indirectly conveyed, that instead of showing any strong emotion, she sat rather with the air of one who did not comprehend the meaning of what had been said. Sackville did not wish to embarrass her; and, therefore, directing his conversation to Mr. Morton, who looked even more affected by the intelligence than his daughter, he asked him whether he had not heard before that Lacy was to be married to Miss Hartley. Mr. Morton replied with a faint and unwilling "yes," and striving to look indifferent, inquired whether Sackville believed the report.

"I think it is probable," said he, quietly: "they seem well suited, and have been thrown a good deal together. Lady Lacy first led me to suspect that such a thing was in view. Lacy himself, too, looked rather conscious when I talked to him once about Miss Hartley. In short, I have no doubt of it; and I am glad to

think it will be so. You know Charles Hartley married the sister. There is something comfortable in a double alliance ; and it will be an excellent match for her."

"Will it be as well for him?" said Mr. Morton.

"Why, yes—I should think it would. She has two great requisites, beauty and fortune ; and is a pleasant, good humoured sort of girl. I suppose you know her?" turning to Agnes.

Agnes could, by this time, reply with much apparent calmness, that she was but slightly acquainted with Miss Hartley ; when Sackville, again turning from her, proceeded, in the same composed tone, to talk of Lacy's expected marriage. "I am glad," said he, "that my friend Lacy has done trifling with ladies' hearts. He is thought to be *un peu volage*—I won't say quite a male coquet—but perhaps a little too fond of being only too agreeable. I could name more than one instance where he has raised false expectations. I don't suppose he meant

to do so ; but, however, with that unfortunate captivation of manner, an engagement is the luckiest thing in the world for him ; for, otherwise, one day or other, he will find himself called to account, poor fellow, for jilting some love-lorn young lady whom he would fancy he had merely been treating with a little common civility."

No immediate reply was made to this observation. Agnes, who was not called upon to speak, remained silent ; and Mr. Morton wished to appear too much occupied in cutting up a pine to think or talk of any thing else. Lady Louisa, who was not usually prompt in reply, was now the first to speak.

" I don't know," said she, " whether I know Miss Hartley. Agnes, do I ?"

Agnes could not tell.

" I think I have seen her," pursued Lady Louisa. " Is not she dark ?"

" No—fair," said Sackville.

" Fair ? Oh ! then I have not seen her :

and so she is to be married to Mr. Lacy. Well! it is a very nice match. Was not this what Charles Eustace was talking about? No—it was Mr. Ducie's marriage. Was it Mr. Ducie or Mr. Lacy that you pulled out of the water once?"

Sackville told her.

"Oh, Mr. Lacy, was it? I always confound the names. Well, they are both very nice young men. Agnes, shall we go?" and the ladies rose and retired to the drawing room.

There Agnes was visited by many an anxious thought which the preceding conversation had excited. She now remembered to have heard, two months ago, some intimations of Lacy's engagement to Miss Hartley, to which, being then unacquainted with Lacy, she paid very little attention. She also remembered to have heard imputations of fickleness thrown out respecting him, which, however slight, unpleasantly confirmed the representations of Sackville. Circumstances all at once appeared in a light

in which her growing attachment had not hitherto permitted her to view them. It was, she confessed, but too possible that she had been construing his attentions more seriously than his real sentiments would warrant ; and she now internally reproached herself for the precipitate surrender of her affections. A delightful vision which she had long indulged, was dispelled in an instant ; and, though there was still much in her prospects to which a sanguine mind would cling with confidence, yet prudence warned her to guard her heart against the admission of hopes which might prove to be fallacious.

We must now return to the dining room, where we left the gentlemen together. Sackville, when the ladies had retired, became absorbed in meditation. His manner attracted the attention of Mr. Morton, who looked at him with an air of inquiry, and would fain have asked the subject of his thoughts. In truth, Sackville only waited for such a question,

but as it never came, he was at length compelled to break silence.

“We have been long acquainted,” said he, speaking with apparent effort, “and I trust you will believe that it must be painful to me to make any communication which may give you uneasiness.” He stopped for a moment. Mr. Morton made no answer, and Sackville slowly proceeded. “I have much to tell you which I scarcely know how to tell. Perhaps you will say, when you know all, that I hesitate from tenderness to my own feelings; but, in truth, it is rather from respect to yours: I can bear the avowal, or I should not undertake to make it. Excuse this weakness. When I come to the point, I am as irresolute as a child.”

He paused, and drew his hand across his forehead, while Mr. Morton regarded him with breathless attention.

“It shall be told,” said Sackville, with a sudden effort. “Mr. Morton, I am a distressed man.”

A short silence followed this confession. Mr. Morton looked at him in mute astonishment, and seemed too much surprised to give utterance to any thing beyond a half articulate exclamation of doubt.

“Yes,” pursued Sackville, with a sigh; “it is too true. You wonder, and with reason, how I can have brought myself into such a situation. I am not an extravagant man, and I flattered myself, till lately, not an imprudent one. But my fortune is not large, and I have diminished it, partly by unsuccessful speculations; partly—no matter how. The long and the short is, that I am in debt. Allen is my chief creditor; he presses for immediate payment; I have not the means of satisfying him; and, in truth, I know not what to do.”

Mr. Morton looked grieved and perplexed, and could only express his dismay and wonder in broken sentences; then, lamented that it was out of his power to assist him; and at last, remarked, by way of consolation, that, as Sackville

was in parliament, his person, at all events, was safe.

“ True,” replied Sackville ; “ but that is a scanty source of comfort. I may, it is true, escape a gaol ; but can I escape the coolness, the scorn, with which the world invariably view a ruined man ? Can I hold up my head again in the presence of those whom I used to regard as no more than my equals ? No—no—I never could ; I should lose my station ; I should be shunned, scouted, and by those who used to court my acquaintance. Oh ! it is a dreadful situation, and must be concealed at all costs.”

“ True—too true,” replied Mr. Morton, with a sigh ; “ and I assure you, my dear Sackville, that I feel for you deeply ; I am afraid it will be idle for me to pretend to assist you ; but, if I might take the liberty of old friendship, and ask to be made, in some degree, your confidant ; if I might know how you are involved ; excuse me if I take a liberty.”

“ I thank you a thousand times,” replied

Sackville. "You have taken a load off my mind ; I did not know whether I might dare to be explicit ; but now I will tell you all ; I shall hurt you by what I say ; but I trust you will forgive it. May I go on ?" said he, and fixed his penetrating eyes on those of Mr. Morton ; who, turning pale with apprehension, replied in a trembling voice, "You may."

"Then, Mr. Morton," resumed Sackville, sinking his voice to an impressive whisper, "it becomes my painful duty to tell you, that I am fully acquainted with your embarrassments."

Mr. Morton started, turned alternately red and pale, and could only re-echo the words of Sackville, as if endeavouring to question their correctness.

"Yes," pursued Sackville ; "I know that you are distressed as well as I ; do not be angry with me for saying so. This is no needless communication. Be assured that I should never have uttered what must be so galling to the feelings of both of us, if the case were not

urgent. Why I do it, remains to be told—and it is the hardest task of all. I am fully informed of the extent and nature of many of your debts—and that, within the last year, you have been twice on the brink of arrest. Yes, Mr. Morton, it is true; you have twice been nearer an arrest than you imagine; but that blow, thank God! has been warded off. A friend stepped in, treated with your creditors, induced a few of them to be patient, and bought up your debts to a large amount, from those who were most urgent in their demands. He did this, as he then thought, with tolerable ease and safety to himself; with some sacrifice, it is true, but not more than he was willing to make for the sake of an old and valued friend. Since that time, circumstances have been changed; he has become involved himself, and the terrible alternative of his own ruin, or of a cruel exposure of your embarrassments, now stares him in the face. But he had rather the former

should happen than that misfortune should fall on you and your excellent family."

"I see it all," exclaimed Mr. Morton, with emotion. "You are the man—and may God reward you—I cannot thank you as I ought."

"Your thanks, my dear Sir, are more than sufficient," replied Sackville, grasping his hand. "But it is painful to dwell on these things; I will come quickly to particulars, and dismiss the subject as soon as I can. Here," producing a paper, "is a list of the bond debts in which I am now your creditor."

Mr. Morton received it in silence, and his countenance fell as he perused it. "I am lost, I am lost," he exclaimed, in a tone of desponding helplessness. "That I should be reduced to such a state! You say you are ruined unless I repay you?"

"Too certainly," replied Sackville, mournfully.

"And that must never be allowed. Yet, as for paying, I could not command the hundredth

part of the sum I owe you ; and then, as for exposure, I do not fear it on my own account—but my family ! Good God ! to disgrace my family ! Sackville, you are not a father—you cannot tell what I suffer.”

He buried his face in his hands ; and several seconds were passed in silence, when suddenly starting up, he exclaimed. “ For the love of Heaven, tell me what I am to do ! ”

Sackville looked down, and his countenance assumed an air of agitation. Something seemed to ruffle his composure in an unusual degree, and a secret was evidently struggling in his bosom, which he almost wanted the power to disclose.

“ This is terrible,” said he, aloud, but as if unconscious of being heard ; “ it is not the time, but I am compelled ! ” Then turning to Mr. Morton, “ You cannot conceive the pain with which I now speak to you. I have to express feelings which I have long intended to declare. I wish I had done so sooner, for I should then

have been spared the pain of avowing them at so unseasonable a time. I feel that it is profanation to utter them now, but necessity compels."

He paused, and Mr. Morton looked anxiously in his face, but made no observation. Sackville laid his hand upon his arm, and in a subdued tone proceeded. "I am going to tell you, what you have probably long suspected. Nobody who has had the advantage of the intimate acquaintance with your daughter Agnes which I have enjoyed, could fail to have been struck with her many delightful qualities; and having observed them, could feel other than attachment. To become her husband has long been the fondest object of my ambition; and I feel it to be no slight additional recommendation, that in being united to so much excellence, I should be binding myself still closer to a family, for all of whom I entertain so sincere a regard."

Mr. Morton looked surprised, and embarrassed, nor did his looks belie his feelings, for

this declaration was quite unexpected, and very unwelcome. Being assured by Lacy's manner that he felt a strong admiration for Agnes, he had begun to calculate upon the possibility and desirableness of an alliance in that quarter ; and seeing that Lacy's attentions were received with pleasure by his daughter, he feared that she would not be easily brought to admit the addresses of any other person. These considerations caused him to ponder, and to receive Sackville's avowal with apparent coldness.

"I am very sensible," said he at length, with a feeble, hesitating voice, "of the honour you do my daughter. It must be gratifying to a father to think, that her merits should be so favourably estimated by one of your excellent judgment. She has been a treasure to me, and will be doubly so to the man who is so fortunate as to win her affections. If you are that person, I sincerely congratulate you."

"And I receive your congratulations most gratefully," replied Sackville. "I feel per-

fectly assured of the state of her affections, and upon that assurance, I now apply for your sanction. Do not, if you respect my feelings, express any further doubt upon a subject so interesting to me, and on which I, the person most concerned, am perfectly satisfied.’

Mr. Morton checked a sigh, and sat vainly labouring to frame an answer which should convey a grateful sense of Sackville’s kindness, without committing himself by a positive acceptance of his proposal. Before he could give it utterance, Sackville had proceeded.

“I see that you are surprised at the time and manner of my application, and I do not wonder at it. It is most unseasonable and abrupt, and requires some explanation. It hurts me very much to seem so deficient in delicacy and respect; but you will pity me when you know all, and I hope forgive me. Mr. Morton, a report has gone abroad, I know not how, that I am engaged to Miss Morton. My chief creditor, I will name him, Allen, has

taxed me with it. I denied the engagement. He then persisted that I had at least an intention of offering myself. I could not deny it, and would return him no answer. A week ago, he sent me this letter, pressing for a settlement of our accounts, and alluding very broadly to my eventual ability to satisfy all his demands in case of a certain event. I took an opportunity of calling to remonstrate with him this morning, and to pray for further time. I found him inflexible, but upon one condition. You do not know how it hurts me to mention it—to mix *her* name with this rascal's dirty traffickings. But I am the slave of circumstances, and must not give way to refinement. To be brief, he promises to let my debt stand over for two years more, on condition of my producing a written paper signed by you, acknowledging me as your future son-in-law. He will then suspend his claims upon me, and I shall not be driven by necessity to subject you to inconvenience. These, my dear Sir, are the humiliating circum-

stances, under which, I appear before you as the suitor of your daughter, and beg for a privilege, which I should consider cheap at any price, but that of honour. My feelings towards her, are only those of the purest and most disinterested attachment ; and it is galling to me to have them first declared to you in a way that may subject them to suspicion. I have, however, one consolation beyond my hopes. I shall be enabled, if you accept my prayer, to relieve you from serious difficulties ; and, believe me, this will be a circumstance which I shall remember with satisfaction to the latest moments of my life."

It was with mingled emotions of gratitude and fear, that Mr. Morton listened to this appeal. He was unwilling to urge what might entail the sacrifice of his daughter's happiness ; he was grateful to Sackville ; he saw the strength of his claims ; and he read a something in his eye, which told him how dreadful might be the consequences, if, by a refusal, he should

convert that friend into an enemy ; and how easily might he be precipitated, through his means, from that station, the loss of which he felt as if he could scarcely survive. He therefore turned to Sackville with an acquiescent smile ; told him that he was happy in the prospect of their nearer relationship, and grasped the hand that was promptly extended, in ratification of their contract. This done, Sackville, without allowing him to recede, but instantly assuming the affair to be settled, poured forth his thanks and professions, vowing eternal love to Agnes, and the most unbounded regard and deference towards his chosen father.

“And now, my dear Sir,” said he, still pursuing the same studied air of respect, “after you have kindly conceded so much to my wishes, I am emboldened to make another request. I have said nothing to your daughter upon this subject ; I wish the first intimation of my intentions to come from you. May I beg that you will take an early opportunity of

speaking to her? Excuse my pressing for an early communication. Lovers, you know, are proverbially impatient. See her and prepare her. I know that I shall find in you an able advocate, and that, whatever points appear in my favour, will be set before her in a convincing light. A young mind like her's, however well disposed towards the suitor, is apt to look at first with some alarm to the prospect of matrimony: but I rely upon your skill and judgment. Pray put me soon out of suspense. I am impatient to receive her answer. Much will depend upon it."

These few last words were uttered with a peculiar inflexion of tone, which distinctly painted to Mr. Morton the terrible alternative which might attend the failure of his errand. They precluded all refusal, and Mr. Morton, though little confident of his daughter's favourable reception of the proposal, summoning into his countenance a feeble effort at cheerful ac-

quiescence, without one audible murmur complied with all that Sackville asked.

Here this important conference ended, and the gentlemen adjourned, to join the ladies in the saloon.

CHAPTER II.

Force cannot be the school of love.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

Marriage is a matter of more worth
Than to be dealt in by attorneyship.

Henry VII. Part I.

ON the following morning, Agnes, by her father's desire, repaired to his private sitting-room. He looked pale and dejected, for he knew that his fate depended on his daughter's compliance, which would not be obtained without a struggle, and the probable sacrifice of her happiness. He endeavoured to gain time and courage by speaking first on irrelevant subjects, and brought round the conversation as naturally as he could to Sackville.

"How fortunate we are," said he, "in having so able and intelligent a friend; so kind and

attentive to your interests—to the interests, indeed, of all of us—but of you in particular.”

Agnes partly acquiesced.

“And then,” pursued Mr. Morton, “he is so superior, so well informed, so sensible, and of such agreeable manners, and so much quickness and address.”

“And presence of mind,” said Agnes, who was thinking at that moment of his great claims upon her gratitude for having saved the life of Lacy.

“Yes, my love,” continued her father; “he is a very excellent person, and the woman whom he distinguishes may be justly proud of his attachment.”

“Certainly,” replied Agnes, “for he does not strike me as being one who would easily become attached to any woman.”

“Right—quite right—just as I think of him. His affections would never be given in opposition to his better judgment; and, therefore, the woman by whom he is won, may consider

herself as receiving a very high and sincere compliment."

"Certainly—a high compliment—and, of course, the most sincere that he could pay."

"I am glad to hear you say so," replied Mr. Morton, gaining courage from her words, "because I know the person to whom he does pay this sincerest of all compliments; and I am happy to think that my dear daughter should be her of whom he has so high and so just an opinion. To keep you no longer in suspense, my love, Sackville has declared his attachment to you. He says, that he has long admired and loved you, and that his happiness depends entirely upon your acceptance of him."

The countenance of Agnes fell, and she turned extremely pale. The tidings were very unacceptable; and she saw at once, that be her answer what it might, it could not fail to be attended with unpleasant consequences. She must either resign Lacy, or alienate a valuable friend. But she felt no difficulty in forming her

determination ; and as there was no doubt in the case, she was enabled to reply with tolerable firmness.

“ I cannot contradict what I have said,” she replied: “ I think any one may be proud of the attachment of Mr. Sackville ; and I am sensible of the honour which he has done me. It is much greater than I am conscious of deserving, and I cannot help wishing, that his attachment had been bestowed where it could have been returned, for it can never be returned by me. I can admire Mr. Sackville’s abilities—I can acknowledge his powers of pleasing—I can regard him as a valuable friend, but I cannot feel for him any affection. I may be wrong in being so insensible to such great merits, but these are my real sentiments, and I would not deceive you by saying otherwise.”

“ Take care, Agnes,” replied her father, ‘ lest, in the meanwhile, you deceive yourself. Do not let any youthful timidity cause you to

return a hasty refusal, of which you may afterwards repent. You speak very modestly, and I think too modestly of the honour he does you, and of your own unworthiness. Do not be led away by this feeling ; it is an amiable one—but it may be carried to excess. You spoke of Sackville's great superiority, as if it were a bar to your attachment. I am aware that a feeling of ease and equality is, in some degree, necessary to love ; but here, I think, you judge hastily. Increased intimacy, and a change in your relative situations, will correct that sentiment of deference which he now seems to inspire. Besides, owing to the charge which your aunt committed to him, you have been accustomed to regard him as a sort of second father—but you must get rid of that impression. Sackville is still a young man—young not only in years, but in appearance and in habits—good-looking, and full of vivacity. As for any attachment which you can have formed elsewhere," pursued Mr. Morton, speaking with greater difficulty, for

he was not hypocrite enough to utter with confidence what he believed to be false, "on that point I feel perfectly easy. You have never received any declaration of attachment, except from Lord Midhurst, if I mistake not—have you?" said he, looking inquiringly at his daughter.

Agnes faintly answered "No."

"So I thought; and I have too much confidence in your sense and steadiness of principle, to believe that you would hastily resign your affections to any one, especially if he had never explicitly declared himself; and I am sure, my dear daughter, you are not one of those weak girls who are apt to construe little foolish attentions into more than was ever meant by them."

Agnes sighed. She felt that she was in no slight danger of falling into the error which her father denounced; and that if Lacy were, indeed, the fickle person that he was represented to be, his attentions might have had very little

serious meaning. But, if such were the case, how could she avow what she had begun to feel for him? To a female mind of delicacy, even under circumstances of encouragement, it must be difficult and embarrassing to acknowledge an attachment which is even avowedly returned. But to confess a passion unsupported by any proof that the attentions of the lover were otherwise than frivolous; to do this, after hearing such conduct denounced as improper by the voice of a parent, was more than Agnes had courage to undertake. Had she so dared, great as was the emergency, she might have been reasonably accused of having been wanting in self-respect, and in that sensitive and retiring modesty which is ever woman's brightest ornament.

“ I am sorry,” said Agnes, looking up timidly in her father's face, “ I am sorry to find, that in refusing Mr. Sackville I must oppose your wishes. But I trust—if I may judge from your uniform kindness—I trust you have too

great a regard for my happiness to wish to urge me to sacrifice it—and indeed—indeed I should sacrifice it entirely, if I were to do what you require of me. It is a serious thing to be united for life to one for whom one can feel no love—it would be misery without hope. I know no punishment more cruel than the lingering wretchedness of such a situation. I know you love your children—you have often said so, and your kindness has shown it—and if so, I am sure, my dear father, that you can never wish to force me into a marriage which can end only in unhappiness.”

“Certainly not, my dear Agnes, I can never *wish* to do that. But why must this marriage end in unhappiness? Is there any so great a hardship in accepting one, whom you confess to have many superior qualities; whom you have known so long and so well; and whose affection for you, no person can doubt?” Agnes answered only with a look of supplication. “There are other reasons,” pursued Mr. Mor-

ton, "reasons still more weighty, which I have not yet told you. You do not know half the merits, half the claims of the man you are refusing. He has placed your father under obligations which I can never repay—he has behaved in the most noble and generous manner. Not only I, but all of you, owe him at this moment that which, if known to you, would make you fall at his feet in gratitude. Surely you cannot now refuse him?"

Agnes, who had sat during this communication with her head resting pensively on her hand, looked up once more in her father's face. "I am indeed grateful to Mr. Sackville," said she, "and wish I might be allowed to show that gratitude in some other better way. It would be a poor return for his kindnesses, (what they are I do not know, but you tell me they are great,) to give him a hand without the heart that should accompany it—how could I reward him *so*? How could I adequately fulfil the duties of a wife, if I could not return his affec-

tion? Oh, my dear father, do not urge me to that which would produce the misery of both. If you have any love for me, you will never persist in so cruel a request."

Mr. Morton started from his chair, and walked hastily across the room. "God help me!" he murmured, in broken accents. "To what am I reduced!—but the blow must fall—I had better come to the point at once. Agnes, my dear child," said he, returning to her, and taking her hand between his own. "I do love you as tenderly as a father ever did—You do not know what I suffer—but I cannot retract—I must urge you, harsh as it may seem. It is for your sake, for all our sakes, that I do it—Agnes, Sackville, *must* be accepted. Refuse him, and I am a lost man. Good God! you are ill! I have been too abrupt; but I will say no more."

"No, no, I am better: tell me all," and the flush of agitation gave once more a faint hue to her cheek, which but an instant before

had been pale as death. Mr. Morton's agitation was scarcely less. "No," he exclaimed; "I cannot tell you: but there *is* a necessity, a terrible necessity for your compliance. Agnes, it is in your power to ruin or to save your father."

"Oh, tell me how. If it is a debt within the reach of my fortune ——"

"My dear child," interrupted Mr. Morton, colouring with shame and agitation, "it is useless to talk to me of pecuniary assistance. Supposing, for argument's sake, that my distress were of that nature, still you must remember that you are not at liberty to relieve it. Your fortune is under the controul of your trustees, and however willing Sackville may be to assist me, yet I have reason to know that Mr. Hawksworth is on that point impracticable. No, Agnes, hear me assure you, which I do in the most solemn manner, that there remains no means of securing your family from their present dreadful situation, but by your acceptance of Sackville's offer. Why should you show

this great repugnance? Surely he has qualities which point him out as a valuable guide through life; and your lot with him would certainly be respectable, and I trust a happy one."

Agnes mournfully shook her head.

"Nay, my dear daughter," said her father, "let me have the comfort of hoping so. We are in difficulties, and must make the best of them. Would to God I could have left you to your own free choice. But it cannot be. Your lot may seem a hard one, but it will be far better than mine. You will have the consolation, and it must be truly great to a disposition like yours, to know that you have saved your parents from shame and sorrow."

"Shame!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Ay, child, misfortune is shame in the eye of society—and that I, who have held my head so high—that I, should—oh, it would drive me mad. Agnes! Agnes! if you have ever felt compassion, save me from that which would be worse than death. I entreat, I implore you—

yes even on my knees ;” and he fell at her feet and grasped her cold trembling hands, with all the energy of despair. “Look at me, my child, ay, look at me, and then judge of what I feel. Think, that by one single word, you can raise me from this abyss of misery. Think, that not I alone, but all of us are to be doomed or saved, by your decision—that unless you relent, the mother that bore you, may be forced to languish out the remainder of her days in obscurity and sorrow, and that you will see a father, who has ever loved you as his life, made for your sake, a by-word, and driven from the dwelling of his parents, houseless, and pennyless, into a wide unfeeling world.”

Agnes almost fainting with agitation, was overcome by an appeal made with such earnestness, and so calculated to wring almost to agony, her naturally acute and tender feelings. Bewildered with the shock of her novel situation, and half insensible with grief, she bowed her head towards her father, who was still kneeling

by her side, and in a feeble voice uttered the words, "I will consent." He made no reply, but clasped her in gratitude to his bosom. Her tears until this moment, had been repressed by the workings of astonishment and terror. But a tenderer emotion now gave them vent, and she wept upon her father's shoulder. Terrible and afflicting as was the decision she had made, she felt relieved by having made it, and even experienced a temporary glow of pleasure and satisfaction, from the reflection, that by this sacrifice of her own happiness, she had soothed the sufferings of an imploring parent.

Neither spoke for some time, for tears had also choked *his* utterance. When at length they did speak, it was at first in indistinct and broken sentences, expressive of his gratitude, and her resignation. They soon grew calmer, and could talk in a composed and steady tone, of those arrangements which had so severely agitated them ; and Agnes, with a firmness at which she was herself surprised, could again

express her willingness to accept the proposals of Sackville. She only entreated that time might be allowed her, that their union might be deferred, if possible, for a year, and that her father would make with Sackville, on that point, as favourable terms as he could.

CHAPTER III.

Oh, hard it is that fondness to sustain,
And struggle not to feel averse in vain ;
But harder still the heart's recoil to bear,
And hide from one, perhaps another there.

BYRON.

MR. MORTON, after taking a grateful and affectionate leave of his daughter, and promising to strive in every thing to consult her happiness, and urge a delay as strongly as he durst, went to communicate the intelligence to Sackville. Without preface or circumlocution, he entered at once into the subject, and told his errand in few words.

“ She consents,” said he, “ but upon conditions.”

Sackville took no notice of the latter words, but grasping his hand, expressed, in warm and

well-chosen terms, the happiness which he received from such an answer. Mr. Morton, encouraged by his manner, and stimulated by the feelings of a father, eager to secure, in some degree, the happiness of a daughter who had sacrificed so much for his sake, again repeated, in a firm tone, that his daughter's acquiescence was merely conditional. Sackville bowed with a smile of conscious security, and stood silently expecting the communication of the stipulated conditions.

Mr. Morton then told them, and Sackville was relieved, by hearing that they contained only a request for postponement, from which, as decay of affection was no consideration with him, he apprehended little danger. He even thought that time might have a beneficial effect, and that Agnes might become less averse to the marriage, and might view it at length as a thing of course, after having been long accustomed to his addresses. Therefore, finding Mr. Morton very urgent upon the minor article of time, he,

after a proper show of resistance, and profession of impatience for the happy event, consented that the ceremony should be deferred till the June of the ensuing year. He required, however, that the marriage should take place between that month and September, at latest; and the consequences of an infringement of this agreement, though not expressed, were sufficiently implied to render them very imperative. He had no wish that their engagement should remain a secret: he had rather, if Agnes approved, that it should be immediately made known. The consent of Mr. Hawksworth, he had no doubt, could easily be obtained, and the long time which would intervene between the announcement of the marriage and its celebration, could always be satisfactorily explained to the world, on the ground of legal delays. Meanwhile, it was not his wish that Agnes should go less into society than before, or that her engagement with him should produce any change in her habits. She was still very young, and he

thought it would be unreasonable to seclude her from those scenes of gaiety which she was so calculated to adorn. After many liberal sentiments of this kind, expressed in the most winning manner, he requested an interview with Agnes ; but declared that however eager to see her, yet, as *his* wishes should always bend to *hers*, he would await her leisure, and not press for an immediate interview while her spirits were yet agitated by the recent announcement.

Mr. Morton then quitted him, to report to his daughter what had passed. He informed her of Sackville's wish to see her, and his willingness to await her leisure, and repeated, as nearly as he could, the well-chosen terms in which the message was couched. Agnes smiled mournfully at the deceitful profession of subservience to her will, yet could not but feel obliged by the delicacy of his attention.

“ I can have no objection,” said she, “ to receive Mr. Sackville as soon as he may choose to see me. I hope I am equal to the effort—I

should gain no additional courage by delay, and therefore wish that our first meeting should be over."

"Since such is your wish," said Mr. Morton, "I will go immediately and bring him; but first, let me earnestly intreat you, on no earthly consideration, to endeavour, in your conference with him, to retract that promise which you have made: consider yourself irrevocably bound to him, and remember that the fate of your parents depends upon your compliance."

Agnes promised strict obedience; and Mr. Morton repaired once more in quest of his intended son-in-law, leaving Agnes in a painful state of suspense, and listening with a beating heart, for the awful sound of approaching footsteps. Minutes, which seemed hours to her apprehension, had slowly elapsed, when at length the door was gently opened, and Sackville entered the room. Agnes could not look at him—but turned away her head, and directed her eyes she knew not where, for she saw nothing.

It was a dreadful moment—her heart beat quicker than before—respiration almost failed—sight and hearing grew imperfect—all sense of external objects seemed to be leaving her, and she thought herself on the point of fainting. She was hardly conscious of his presence, till she perceived that somebody was seated near her, that the hand which hung cold and motionless by her side, was gently taken, and that a voice was expressing in its softest accents—she knew not what: but she was alive to the necessity of rousing herself to a consciousness of what he said; and the effort was soon made.

It was long before she had any other task than that of listening; for Sackville, who saw her agitation, and wished to give her time to recover; without pressing for any confirmation of that consent which he assumed to be irrevocably granted, poured forth, with an eloquence which, under other circumstances, would have been irresistible, all that the most devoted attachment could prompt to the most disinte-

rested of suitors. So amiable, so submissive did he seem, so utterly dependent on her will, that Agnes, while she listened, was almost deceived into a temporary belief of her power over him, and meditated, for an instant, to throw herself upon his compassion, avow that her affections were placed elsewhere, and deprecate the impending punishment which it was in his power to inflict upon her father.

But she had been long and intimately acquainted with Sackville, and knew too well with whom she had to deal; and the rising reflection on the probable uselessness of such an appeal, together with the remembrance of her father's injunction, dispelled the transitory hope.

Sackville adverted with delicacy and judgment to her wish that their nuptials should be deferred; and without seeming to regard such a wish as any proof of the weakness of her affection for him, remarked how natural it was that a very young person should look forward with some alarm to the prospect of quitting the

home of her parents. "But in this case, my dear Agnes," said he, "I hope these evils will be lightened to a greater degree than they are in the case of the generality of young brides. You have had the advantage of knowing me well before you have committed your happiness to my care; and intimacy, and the situation which I have held, have already given me, in some degree, the rights of a protector. You will also be removed to no strange home; but one to which I am sure you are much attached, where you passed so many happy years under the care of my excellent friend, your dear aunt, by whose kindness it is now mine."

He then proceeded with much feeling to strike the tender chord which these associations were likely to affect; and artfully connecting himself with the scenes of her childhood, and the memory of her benefactress, he soon succeeded, through the medium of her early affections, in awakening a more tender regard towards

himself than she would previously have allowed to be possible. Her mind was agitated with various emotions; affectionate regret for her departed aunt, and vivid recollections of early pleasures; then appeared Sackville in numerous contrasted lights—the former friend of a dear relation—the menacer of a father's happiness—once her firm and valued adviser, to whom, in default of parental aid, she would have looked for support—now her suitor, by compulsion, ruining with remorseless selfishness all her best hopes of earthly happiness: but feeling acutely as she did the extent of the injury which Sackville had inflicted, and viewing his conduct in its full enormity, she could not avoid being soothed by his manner, and confessed to herself that the evils of her situation were really lessened by the amiable and seductive colouring which his flattering tongue could lend to every circumstance of their intended union. She knew not how to make an ungracious reply to an address

so fraught with every thing that could disarm displeasure, and timidly said, that she was willing to conform to his directions.

“ If I must quarrel with any thing,” said Sackville, with one of his most engaging smiles, “ it shall be with the obedient tone of that answer. It was rather like an address to a guardian. However, if you wish me once more to be somewhat authoritative before I lay down my office, I will exercise a little gentle tyranny upon you, and request that you will partake of society as freely as if we were not engaged, and that you will not allow me to be any restraint upon your actions. No: I will not be thanked by you—it is the world at large that is my debtor—and they, indeed, have need to thank me for not depriving them of you, who are so great an ornament and acquisition wherever you appear. To come to particulars—I hope I may accompany you to the Redborough’s ball on Wednesday. It will give me pleasure to see you go into society the same as

before : I love to have you seen and admired, and to be myself the witness of it ; and that is a pleasure which I hope you are too kind to deny me."

Agnes professed, with truth, to feel very little inclination for society, and under present circumstances would willingly have declined the ball at Westcourt ; but as he seemed to wish that she should not forego it, she had no other course than to comply. His object in pressing this point was twofold : first, to render his engagement generally known and acknowledged ; and secondly, to give to his own conduct an air of liberality, and to avoid the appearance of timidity and concealment.

After the previous discussion, Sackville, wishing to wean her mind from all harassing thoughts, led her insensibly into cheerful conversation upon subjects less immediately connected with their union. Her confidence and tranquillity were gradually restored ; and this interview, the purport of which was so cruelly afflict-

ing, and which, at its commencement, had been attended with such a painful excess of agitation, ended at length with a composure on the part of Agnes, which, when she retired to muse over the past in solitude, she felt to be almost unaccountable.

CHAPTER IV.

I like not fair terms and a villain's mind.

Merchant of Venice.

WE must now return to fill up a slight chasm in the history of the proceedings of Sackville, and relate what passed between the time of his quitting Lacy Park on the preceding day, and his appearance at the dinner-table at Dodswell.

After quitting the Lacys, he proceeded to a small neighbouring town, and stopped at a house situated in the outskirts, at which resided the person already introduced to our readers, by the name of Richard Allen. This person was one whom it was difficult to designate very briefly. He called himself a land surveyor, in addition

to which, and the occasional occupation of a valuer of tithes, he was agent to one or two estates, acted sometimes as an auctioneer, farmed, speculated in building, and made money in more ways than his neighbours were generally acquainted with. He had begun life inauspiciously, as clerk in a bank which failed. He afterwards obtained the more lucrative situation of justice's clerk, in a populous district, where, in the course of a dozen years, he picked up some law and a good deal of money. He was supposed to be in good circumstances, and, as his wealth had flowed from various sources, nobody knew exactly how, was generally pronounced to be "a bit of a rogue."

On this point, nobody was much mistaken; and if the world erred, it was only with respect to the *quantum* of his knavery, which was rated, except by *one* person, very much below the truth. Nobody, however, wished to think more severely of him than was necessary, for he was an useful person, and had a civil, cheerful,

popular manner, which equally recommended him to high and low ; and, however his neighbours might mentally consign him to eventual perdition, they would, at the same time, internally confess that they could “ better spare a better man.”

Allen had not the sullen scowl, or designing sneer of your open villains, who carry a caution in their faces to counteract their schemes. He was a little, busy, brisk, obliging man ; all gaiety, civility, and seeming candour, who had his ready laugh and joke for every one, who was the frequent referee in petty disputes, the boon companion of the neighbouring farmers, the leading wag in their convivial meetings, and who could sing a comic song at a benefit club feast, better than any man in the Hundred.

It was at the door of this person that Sackville alighted, on the day abovementioned, and was ushered, by the bowing, smiling master of the mansion, into a small back-room, furnished with a clerk’s desk, va-

rious dusty lackered boxes, deeds, plans, and advertisements of sales. There was a good deal of eager attention on the part of Allen, through which an observant eye might perhaps have detected some indications of secret uneasiness—"I am quite glad you are come, Mr. Sackville," said he, bustling meanwhile about the room, and putting things out of his visitor's way, "for I knew you would be wanting to see me—and I was thinking of going over to you—and I have made out the valuation—and——"

"Very good," interrupted Sackville—"I will look at that some other time—I am come to speak to you upon other business now."

Allen bowed and looked grave: there was something in Sackville's tone that jarred unpleasantly on his ear; and he began to be officiously active in taking charge of his hat and whip, and apologizing for the disordered state of the apartment.

"Are we secure from being overheard?"

said Sackville. "I ask for your sake as well as mine."

Allen assured him that they were.

"Very well," pursued the former, "then now to business. Have you got me the list of Mr. Morton's debts?"

"I have, Sir," said Allen, and gave him a paper.

"Are these all?"

"All, I believe, Sir. We have not been able to discover any other bond debts; and the mortgages specified over the leaf, comprize all the landed property that he is known to have. I myself, am creditor for all the sums lent on bond that are marked with red ink, and am mortgagee of the Draycot Magna, and Shawley farms, and also the Dodswell domain."

"You have not allowed my name to appear?"

"No, Sir, no—I have kept all close—I believe you will find that I have done every thing quite correct according to your directions."

“I am satisfied,” said Sackville: “you have acquitted yourself extremely well; and now I have other plans in which I shall look for your assistance.”

“You may command me, Sir,” said Allen.

“Yes,” replied Sackville, in a peculiar tone, “I know I may—I will now tell you shortly what I want you to do—I wish Mr. Morton to be made to understand that I am his principal creditor, having made myself such, in order to save him from being pressed by you, when you were much in want of money yourself; and that I accordingly received from you an assignment of some of his bond debts and mortgages, on giving you my own bond to their full amount; that delicacy prevented my mentioning the circumstance to Mr. Morton at the time; and that my own unforeseen and pressing embarrassments alone, could now have forced me to disclose it. Do you understand?”

“Completely, Sir: though I don’t know what your reasons are.”

“Never mind them,” pursued Sackville, with a smile. “Now hear the steps which I wish you to take. In the first place, you must make a regular assignment to me of Mr. Morton’s bonds to you, and also of the mortgages, for which I will give you my own bond, which, as you know, is perfectly good security. Next, I wish you to take an early opportunity of acquainting Mr. Morton of the state of affairs between us. At some future time we can, if we like it, easily re-transfer our separate securities, and there the transaction between us will terminate.”

Allen stared, and smiled a hesitating acquiescence to this sweeping and novel mode of transacting business.

“And now, Allen,” continued Sackville, “you are to act the character, not only of a creditor, but of a merciless one. With this view, I will write a letter as from yourself to me, dated about ten days back, pressing for immediate payment. This you shall copy while

I am here, and I will take it with me to Dods-well, and show it to Mr. Morton. You can fold it up, and seal it; and we can imitate the postmark sufficiently well for our purpose. You are no bad hand at an imitation."

Allen gave an uneasy smile, and hastily placed before Sackville the materials for writing. The letter was then written by Sackville; copied by Allen in the proper form; directed, sealed, the seal broken, the letter creased and soiled, and a fac simile of the postmark ingeniously executed on the cover.

"And now, Allen," pursued Sackville, "I will tell you what, in addition to all this, I mean to represent to Mr. Morton. I shall tell him, that having heard a report, which you are rather inclined to disbelieve, of my being engaged to marry Miss Morton, you are willing to suspend your demand for immediate payment of the debt I owe you, only on condition of my being able, within a week from this day, to

produce to you a written paper from Mr. Morton, certifying the truth of such a report."

Allen looked very grave, and did not seem to like the proposal. "I beg your pardon, Sir," said he, "for presuming to object; but I think that if I were to make such a stipulation, I should take a great deal too much upon myself; and I don't quite like to be represented in such a light to Mr. Morton. I think it would end in a disagreement."

"Why, Allen!" said Sackville, with a scornful laugh, "are you afraid of quarrelling with your debtor? with the man that lies so utterly at your mercy?"

"But, Mr. Sackville, you forget that the debts are to pass in your name."

"Yes, but I have made you my creditor for the full amount; and unless I can marry Miss Morton, you may have a very reasonable doubt that I shall not be able to discharge my debt to you. As for a quarrel with Mr. Morton,

never dream of it. I trust to your address to make the matter easy to his feelings. You will find him slow to take offence."

"It may be so, Sir," rejoined Allen, with a dogged air of bluntness and simplicity; "but I don't see how I am to be the better for these schemes."

"As for that, Allen, though no immediate benefit may accrue to you, yet, as I am disposed to stand your friend, whatever is for my advantage, must ultimately be for yours. Besides, it is always my intention to reward you handsomely for your trouble; and though you may not like to make out any account of the time expended in these secret services, you shall find me a liberal task master. As an earnest of my good intentions, I beg you to accept this draft in advance."

Allen took the proffered paper with a bow of acknowledgment, but still seemed reluctant to undertake the part that was pressed upon him;

pleaded his ignorance of the ultimate object proposed, and his fears, lest by proceeding in the dark, he should bring himself into some unpleasant situation.

“You *have* brought yourself into an unpleasant situation,” replied Sackville, his countenance darkening as he spoke, “a situation which leaves you no choice, but to obey. I need not remind you that you are speaking to the man that can hang you. The circumstances of the forged draft can hardly have escaped your recollection. I do not, however, wish unnecessarily to recal things that are past; I should not have done so if it had not been for these symptoms of hesitation. As for any difficulties into which you can be brought, you are too clever a fellow to be easily entangled; and I can hardly suppose that you would affect any squeamishness before me; we know each other too well. It would be perfectly ridiculous. You are too wise to play so foolish a part. As

for your wish to know my motives, and whole plan of operation, it is a very excusable piece of curiosity, which it is quite needless for me to gratify. It is a good maxim through life, Allen, never to tell more than is necessary."

"Perhaps it may, Mr. Sackville," replied Allen; "but when a person is anxious to do the best he can for a gentleman, he naturally likes to be trusted. And now, Sir, if you please, I'll just tell you that it was only the wish of being trusted, that made me ask you any thing about it. I know your plans and your reasons, Sir, just as well as if you had explained them. It is true, Sir, and I will convince you of it. You want to marry Miss Morton. You have as good as told me that yourself; but that is not all. You have just found out, that if you don't marry her yourself, there is another that will, and that other is Mr. Lacy."

"And how did you find out that?" cried Sackville, after a short pause of surprise. "I

did not know, Allen, that love affairs were in your line."

"Few things come amiss to me, Sir," replied Allen with a laugh. "I always go about with my ears and eyes open, and as I am free in my talk to other people, they are always the same to me. I believe, Sir, I know pretty well what is passing in most neighbouring families—not that I mean to boast of it—one cannot help hearing a little, Sir. Servants know more than their masters suppose, and they will talk, Sir, they will talk."

"You are a clever spy," said Sackville, with a smile; then after a short time spent in rumination, "Your information," he resumed, "may, for aught I know, be very correct with respect to the intentions of Mr. Lacy; but I must lay my positive injunctions upon you, never from henceforth to mention them. As his marriage with Miss Morton, is, for many reasons, never likely to take place, the less that is said of it the better.

You will offend me very much by not observing strict silence on the subject. You perhaps know, that the Mortons and Lacys have only very lately begun to be friendly after many years of coldness. Now, Allen, I have no scruple in saying to you, that under the present circumstances it would be much better for all parties that they should be upon the same cool terms as formerly."

"I understand you, Sir," said Allen.

"Young Lacy," pursued Sackville, "led the way to a reconciliation, and got into favour by an act of civility to Lord Rodborough. Perhaps you know that the refusal of the Bloxwich estate was offered to Lord Rodborough by Sir William Lacy, in the idea of its being a greater object to Lord R. than to himself."

"I do, Sir," replied Allen; "and if you will be so good as to promise me never to mention, nor even hint what I am going to say, I will tell you something about that property."

"You may rely upon me," said Sackville.

“Well, then, Sir,” lowering his voice, “the title is not worth *that*,” snapping his fingers as he spoke.

“Have you known this long?”

“Yes, Sir, some time.”

“And have you ever told it in confidence to any but me?”

“To none but you, Sir,” replied Allen.

Sackville remained silent for several minutes, while his countenance underwent frequent changes, as if the difficulties and advantages of some new project, were alternately passing in review before him.

“Have you ever had much to do with Sir William Lacy?” was his first question, after a long silence.

“Yes, Sir; I have often been employed by him in one way or another; and know him very well.”

“And what do you think of him?” asked Sackville.

“Why, Sir, he is a pleasant gentleman to

talk to; and good-humoured, and free spoken, and one that likes to have his joke; but I don't think, somehow, that he is a clever hand at business. He is too flighty, Sir, too fond of talking of this thing, or that thing, or any thing that comes into his head; and he is mortally careless about his papers, and rather short of memory."

"The sort of man," pursued Sackville, "that would not remember whether you had told him a thing or not, and who, if you wrote to him a letter of business, probably would not read it through."

"Likely enough, Sir, by what I have seen of him."

"Well now, Allen, it strikes me that from your long acquaintance with him, having out of compliment offered him the first refusal of this estate, you might, by possibility, also think proper to give him a hint about the defectiveness of the title."

"I never did, I assure you, Sir."

“Well, well; but you might have done so; and if you had, Sir William might have totally forgotten it.”

“Possibly, Sir,” was Allen’s answer.

“You wrote to him, I believe, on the subject?”

“I did, Sir.”

“Was your letter a long one?”

“Yes: I had many other things to mention, besides the Bloxwich business.”

“So much the better. Now, Allen,” pursued Sackville, “this letter he has destroyed. I made that discovery this morning at Lacy Park. The Bloxwich property happened accidentally to be mentioned, and he said he would have shown me your letter about it, if he had not unluckily burnt it.”

“Well, Sir?” said Allen, rather drily.

“Oh, you shall soon be enlightened,” continued Sackville. “I am coming rapidly to the point. Here is a long letter on business, written to a man notoriously inattentive, which letter

he has since destroyed. Do you suppose he remembered half of it?"

"I should think not."

"Or could recollect what was or was not in the letter?"

Allen repeated his negative.

"Would he then be able to contradict a positive assertion respecting the contents of that letter? I say, for instance, that he is told that the letter which he destroyed, contained a hint respecting the defective title of the Bloxwich property, would he be able to deny it? or, not having the letter, could he rebut the assertion?"

"I should think not," replied Allen.

"I am glad that such is your opinion," resumed Sackville; "because this is the representation which, upon some favourable opportunity, I shall request you to make to Mr. Morton. I wish him to be led to think that Sir William Lacy had learned from you that the Bloxwich estate was not a desirable purchase. Nay, man,

don't pretend to remonstrate: it must be done; you know that I have the means to enforce obedience, and am not the person to be trifled with," and, as he said these words, he directed towards the hesitating Allen, a short, stern, intimidating glance, which distinctly painted to his helpless tool the terrible ruthlessness with which he could exercise his power if irritated by resistance.

Allen cowered, abashed and trembling, beneath the influence of that glance.

"Well, Mr. Sackville," said he, with a deprecating shrug, "it is not for such as me to argue and advise; but it is a strange business, and, to tell you my mind, I don't at all like it. I shall offend a great many people, and get into all sorts of trouble. There are my employers for the Bloxwich property—they'll think it very strange in me to go and let out that secret about the title. to the first person it is offered to. Then there is Sir William Lacy: I shall lose

his favour, I am pretty sure, by going and telling lies about him. My Lord Rodborough will be angry that I didn't tell him as well as Sir William. And what is it all for? To breed dissensions between neighbours! A pretty employment for a man of my character!"

"*Your* character! Come, come, Allen! that must have been a slip of the tongue, or you forgot, perhaps, who you were talking to. Never fear, I'll carry you through; and as for solid recompence, you shall not want that, my *honest* fellow. Why, you are actually growing conscientious! It is a pity I am so pressed for time, or I would have let you carry on the joke. Breeding dissensions between neighbours! and such neighbours! such old and attached friends! Oh, it is really too atrocious. However, Allen, joking apart, the thing positively must be done. The 'when' and the 'how' shall be told you hereafter. And now, I believe, I have said all that is necessary, and I shall depend upon your

strict observance," and then, with a good-humoured smile, and a gracious inquiry after Allen's family, Sackville took up his hat and departed.

It will have appeared from the preceding dialogue, that Sackville had the means of exercising a strong controul over Allen. He had in his possession a draft which Allen had forged in the name of Mrs. Denham, when in want of money several years ago. Mrs. Denham, out of a kind but mistaken spirit of lenity, had forborne to prosecute; but at the same time had, very inconsistently, kept both the forgery, and written confirmatory proofs of it, and they were found among her papers at the time of her death. Mrs. Denham, during her last illness, informed Sackville confidentially of this circumstance, and requested that the paper, if found, might be immediately destroyed, and that Allen might be allowed to escape with a suitable admonition. On the death of this lady the paper passed into

the hands of Sackville, who was left her executor and residuary legatee. How far he had complied with her dying injunctions our readers have already seen.

CHAPTER V.

Sweet pliability of man's spirit that can, at once, surrender itself to illusions, which cheat expectation, and sorrow of their weary moments !

STERNE.

WE must now return to Herbert Lacy, whom we shall find looking forward, with the joyous anticipation of prosperous love, to the ball at Westcourt on the ensuing Wednesday, where he felt assured that he should again meet Agnes. His impatience, however, was not to be controlled, even by this promise of a speedy meeting ; and on the Monday he rode over to call at Dodswell. Unluckily every body was denied to him ; and, therefore, the ball was still the goal to which his ardent hopes must be directed.

At length, Wednesday evening arrived, and a very short time seemed now to intervene between him and happiness. Lady Lacy had put in requisition the family diamonds; and, attired to the complete satisfaction of herself and maid, proceeded to require a decided answer from her vacillating husband. Sir William had for many days been grumbling at intervals about the approaching ball, and now at length, when pressed for a decision, sturdily determined not to go.

“I think you had better,” said Lady Lacy.

“Why?” said Sir William, very drily.

“Why? oh—why—because I think you will like it.”

“Thank you, my dear, but I am sure I shall not. Have you any other reason?”

“Yes, many; in the first place, I think you should go, because you ought.”

“‘Should’ and ‘ought’ are equivalent terms; therefore your position is, that I ought to go because I ought. Quite incontrovertible; and why ought I?”

“Now, my dear Sir William, that is so tiresome! I wish you would not plague me with your reasons. You know very well that it is right you should go, because they asked us, and it would not look civil not to go; and if you went it would please Lord Rodborough.”

“My dear Lady Lacy, Lord Rodborough is not so easily pleased as you imagine.”

“I don’t know how that may be, but I know that you have no good excuse for staying away.”

“Yes; I am labouring under an indisposition—to go,” he added, in a whisper.

“You don’t mean that you are ill?”

“Why not? Surely a man in my station may be allowed to have a cold.”

“But, Sir William, you have no cold—I cannot say *that*—it would not be true.”

“That is my concern, not yours. You can say I told you I had a cold; and people will only respect you the more for taking your husband’s word so easily.”

Lady Lacy looked rather baffled ; but returned once more to the charge. “ I think,” said she, “ if I go, you should.”

“ That, my dear, is what logicians call a *non sequitur*. Our cases are very different. For me to appear at the Westcourt ball would be neither an advantage to others, nor a pleasure to myself : but everybody knows that you must go to show your jewels, and chaperon Herbert.”

“ Chaperon Herbert ! Nonsense, Sir William ! Herbert can chaperon himself. However, I see there is no use in talking—if you won’t, you won’t—that’s plain—only I really wish you would, because people will think it strange to see me alone ; I shall look so odd without you !”

“ My dear, you do yourself an injustice ; I have no doubt you will look quite as well as your neighbours. As for the practice of a wife appearing alone in public, console yourself with

the reflection, that it is both frequent and fashionable." Sir William was evidently impracticable; and, by Herbert's advice, Lady Lacy forbore all further entreaty, and made up her mind to go without him.

At length the carriage was at the door, and Herbert naturally impatient to be gone. Sir William took him aside before parting.

"Herbert," he said, with a good-humoured smile, "let me, once more, before you go into the inflammatory atmosphere of a ball-room, temper your ardour with a little of my cool discretion. Beware of making a declaration. Dance with her, and talk to her as much as you please, but on no account commit yourself. You can lose nothing by delay. Your attachment, if of the true kind, will only grow the stronger—if not, it cannot be such as would ensure the prospect of happiness in marriage. And now, good night—go, and be happy."

It seemed impossible to Herbert, at that

joyful moment, that such an injunction should fail to be accomplished; and the conviction increased in force as he arrived within sight of the stately mansion of Westcourt, which, with the lights gleaming through the darkness from the numerous windows of the suite, and from the moving lines of carriages, which were now assembling in considerable numbers, presented a very brilliant spectacle.

The ball of this night was one of those fêtes by which Lord Rodborough at once gratified his love of display, upheld his consequence, contrived for a considerable time to fill the heads of his neighbours, and dispensed, at an easy rate, that extensive hospitality which, though so commendable in his situation, he was much averse to the more effectual mode of paying off by small instalments. The ball had been talked of for two months already, and the youthful bosoms of many who were included in the favoured list had long beat high with expectation. The preparations had been declared to

exceed belief. Report said, that the grand suite was to be newly furnished for the occasion ; that men from Gillows' had come down for that purpose ; and extra buildings had been erected for the reception of the horses and carriages. Herein, however, was found to be some mistake ; as no men had arrived from Gillows', or had ever been sent for ; and the report of the preparation of additional stabling was found to have originated in the erection of a new deer-house. Nevertheless, the ball was certainly to be one of the best that ever that county had been blessed with. There was to be a royal duke—*that* was certain, though it was not known which ; several foreigners of the first distinction ; a large assortment of nobility from distant counties ; and half-a-dozen persons of fashionable notoriety to be stared at by the —shire natives : the band was to consist of a select detachment from the Almack's orchestra, headed by Colinet ; and Gunter, with half his shop at his back, was to come down in person to prepare

the supper; plate was to be displayed in unexampled profusion; and the tables were to groan under the united services of several distinguished friends.

Numerous were the engagements which had been made and unmade with reference to this great event; and most of the houses, within ten miles of Westcourt, were to be filled for the occasion, the Lacys being almost the only exception to this general spirit of accommodating hospitality.

Lady Lacy and Herbert were rather early, but found several persons assembled. A very large party was staying in the house, and consequently the rooms did not present that meagre promise of gaiety which is generally held out to early arrivers at a ball. The *coup d'œil* was very good. The gallery, a long and handsome room, was appropriated to dancing, and was brilliantly illuminated by an immense lamp, procured for the occasion, the ponderous bulk of which, as it hung suspended over the heads of the visitors

caused some of the more apprehensive seniors to turn rather an anxious eye towards the massy chain by which it was upheld. In the anti-room to the gallery was a considerable assemblage of persons, and amongst them, standing near the door, was Lady Rodborough, stationed ready to receive her visitors, and talking at intervals to Mr. Bellasys, one of those favoured dangles who were honoured with her public notice, a gentleman of good face, figure, and address, who, without any great aid from wealth, talents, or connections, had, by dint of thinking well of himself, induced many others to be of the same opinion.

It would have been an amusing study to one who had nothing else to engage his attention, to observe with what dexterous discrimination her ladyship performed the duties of reception; how, without any stately airs of coldness, or the slightest departure from cheerful civility, she could mark and convey to the initiated bystanders of her particular set, her estimation of

the respective pretensions of the passing visitors; and, at the same time, preserve a full assertion of her own superior consequence in the calm air with which she saw the united gentility of the county pass in review before her.

Her reception of Lady Lacy was very satisfactory; considering the slighness of their acquaintance it was perhaps more full of *empressement* than could have been expected; and showed, that Lady Rodborough had taken a higher estimate of the importance of the Lacy family, than the generality of their neighbours did, and was conscious of those claims which they themselves were so backward in asserting. Lady Lacy lost no time in acquitting herself of an apology for Sir William, who, she guardedly said, “did not *feel himself* well enough to come out.”

Lady Rodborough was “very sorry,” and smiled and bowed her off as expeditiously as she could; and then turned to say a few words

to Herbert, to tell him that she had heard of him at Huntley, and to talk a little about the Applebys, who, she said, were staying at Dodswell, and were to come with the Morton party. This explained to Lacy that Agnes was not yet arrived; and his eyes, which had been anxiously wandering in quest of her, became more quiescent from that moment.

Fresh arrivals soon warned him not to engross many minutes of Lady Rodborough's valuable attention, and he moved onward to pay his respects to the Ladies Jane and Mary Sedley. From these young ladies his reception was very favourable. Their father, who had lately received a good report of the state of Sir William Lacy's circumstances, and had discovered Herbert to be the only son, had given them to understand, that he was a person to whom they might venture to be gracious; and Herbert now received, in their present treatment of him, the benefit of this intimation.

Lord Rodborough had not yet accosted him. He was sitting on a sofa in the gallery, making himself agreeable to a foreign princess, and at the same time repressing the caresses of an Italian greyhound, and playing with the light flowing curly locks of his youngest daughter, a child of about six years old. He had studied all modes of appearing with effect, and had decided in his own mind, that to be stately, was *mauvais ton*, and a state device for assuming consequence ; and that nothing would have a better air than to seem indifferent to his own splendour, to sink as much as possible the character of the host, leave the cares of reception to Lady Rodborough, and lounge about the house, and be carelessly good humoured, and negligently civil to all who might happen to fall in his way.

So far was decided ; but this was not sufficient. The pursuance of this line of conduct alone, could not have distinguished him from his guests ; whereas, though his ostensible object,

like theirs, was only to amuse himself, it was necessary that he should be much more at home, than any of them in common propriety ought to be. Any little sprain or accident, that would have enabled him to dispense with the strict formalities of an evening dress, or to wear a sling, or a slashed sleeve, or to attire himself in any other interesting manner, would have been very convenient. But as not even gout would come to his aid, and allow him to let the world see, that he was conscious of being in his own house, he was obliged to have recourse to other methods of producing a sensation. It struck him that a display of parental fondness, would form a very interesting and softening contrast with the more awful points of his character: and accordingly his youngest daughter, a beautiful child, who was like her father, and had been indulged into being very fond of him, was kept up beyond her usual hours, that she might hang about him, attract the attention of the ladies, be a pretty plaything when he

had nothing else to do, and a convenient excuse for any inattention to his less distinguished guests, of which he might think proper to be guilty.

CHAPTER VI.

From the top of all my trust,
Mishap hath thrown me in the dust.

SIR T. WYATT.

MEANWHILE, the minutes rolled on, the crowd poured in, and the contents of the overflowing anti-room, now half filled the spacious gallery. The band commenced an enlivening air; young ladies and gentlemen began to file off from the sides to the centre; sundry arrangements seemed to be made, in which was chiefly audible, the word "*vis-à-vis*:" there was a momentary crowd, and movement, and confusion; when all at once, order sprung up, like the world out of chaos, from this seeming irregularity; and as the chaperons fell back, a

large proportion of the younger part of the assembly, were seen to be symmetrically arranged in several regular hollow squares: a slight double clap of the hand was heard: the band struck up, and the ball was begun.

A quadrille was ended, and the Mortons were not come; another was begun, and they were still absent; and Herbert, who was vexed at their non-appearance, could not help wondering to his partner, Lady Mary Sedley, what could make them so very late.

“I don’t know,” said the young lady, in a tone, which also implied that neither did she care. “I suppose it is only Lady Louisa taking time to make up her mind to be imprudent, and come out. Poor Lady Loo! What a pity she can never fancy herself quite well! Whenever you ask her how she does? she says, invariably, “thank you, better.” I cannot understand how she happens to be always improving, and never as well as other people. She must have had a large stock of illness to begin with.”

Herbert next ventured to mention Agnes, and to sound Lady Mary's opinion of her: but the lady did not seem interested in the subject, merely said she was a nice girl, and after finding out a likeness for her, which Herbert could not feel to be complimentary, was glad to turn the conversation to some good mark for ridicule. Herbert unintentionally assisted her in this respect, by asking, if she knew the Applebys.

"Oh, perfectly," was her answer. "You must not quiz them to me, Mr. Lacy, for they are somehow or other related to us. Lady Appleby always calls us cousins. What a dear, civil creature she is! She says pretty things to one, that sound as if they had been taken, word for word, out of a note of congratulation. And then what a sprightly person *he* is! I see them now—there he stands, pitying himself for some piece of good fortune."

"Were not they to come from Dosedwell?"

“Yes,” said Lady Mary, “and I suppose the Mortons are come too.”

Herbert looked eagerly around him, and at that moment, the crowd opening, enabled him to see the object of all his solicitude. She was standing near the entrance to the ball-room, leaning on the arm of Sackville, who was talking to Lady Rodborough. She looked grave, and rather pale; but Herbert was disposed to attribute this to the glare of the lamps, and thought her as beautiful as ever. He saw her eye directed to the place where he was, and he thought she recognized him; but this might be a mistake, for she betrayed no signs of recognition, and immediately looked another way. Herbert tried to catch her eye, but in vain. She soon retired to a seat, where she was screened from his view, by the standers in front; and Herbert was obliged to resign all hopes of seeing more of her, till he had made his bow to Lady Mary.

Scarcely had he conducted that lady to a seat,

than he saw Mr. Morton near him. He thought he appeared unwilling to accost him, sidled off as he approached, and persisted in looking another way, till he could no longer refrain from acknowledging Herbert's address. When he did, it was rather uneasily. He said a few common-place things about the ball; inquired after Sir William; regretted not having been at home, when Lacy called on the Monday; and then seemed glad to break off the conference, by turning to talk to another of his acquaintance. His manner was evidently changed from what it was when they met last; and Herbert was uneasy at the circumstance.

Unconscious how he could have given offence, he was the more desirous of trying what would be his reception from Agnes. He soon found her: she was seated, and Sackville by her side. She seemed to be conscious of his approach, but could not look at him; turned still more pale, cast down her eyes, and tried to seem attentive to what was said by the Miss

Tyrwhitts, who were sitting on the other side of her. They were very ineligible witnesses for this meeting, having made good use of their eyes at Huntley, and being at least suspicious, if not certain, that Agnes and Lacy were mutually attached. Sackville comprehended all the unpleasantness of the situation in which Agnes was placed. He saw her agitation, and wishing to give her time for recovery, drew off the attention of Lacy, by addressing him first himself.

“I was sorry to miss you,” said he, “on Monday. I had ridden out not long before you called.” He then inquired after Sir William and Lady Lacy, and by the time Herbert had answered his questions, Agnes could receive him with tolerable composure. Her manner on his first approach, had startled and perplexed him, and her present air, though much improved in composure, was still grave and distant, and quite unlike what he expected. He felt chilled by such a reception, and hardly knew how to

address her. An inquiry after Lady Louisa, and a question, whether she was present or not, were the most obvious things to say after the first greeting.

“Tolerably well,” and “she is not here,” were the brief, cold answers which he received; and then followed a long pause, equally embarrassing to the feelings of each. The coldness of Agnes was unaccountable to Herbert, and for a moment, he questioned with himself, whether he could have offered her any unintentional slight, by overlooking her in the crowd. “I first caught sight of you,” said he, wishing to be satisfied on this point, “just before the end of the last quadrille: had you been in the room long?”

She said she had but just entered it.

“Then you will acquit me of blindness, I hope?”

“Certainly,” was all she answered; and it was uttered with an air of absence, as if she scarcely knew what she said.

Nothing could be more discouraging, yet Herbert was going to address her again, when he felt his arm touched by some one behind, and Hartley's black, curly head, was projected across him, dispensing "how d'ye do's" to Agnes and the Miss Tyrwhitts. "Herbert," said he, immediately afterwards, half aloud, "I knew it was you, though I had not the honour of seeing your face; I saw Miss Morton's, and that was enough, for I knew where you ought to be. Miss Morton, Lacy does not look happy, I hope he has not been in the water again."

Agnes and Herbert both attempted, with ill success, to cover their vexation under a forced laugh, and Hartley, who saw that his observation was not well received, turned away, and applied himself to the easier task of entertaining the Miss Tyrwhitts. Herbert, at the same time walked away, dejected and mortified, by a reception for which he could assign no possible reason. He had, however, some satisfaction in thinking, that it did not seem the result of

anger. Perhaps it arose simply from dejection ; perhaps from illness, or fatigue ; and this thought sensibly appeased him.

He was standing at a little distance from Agnes, consoling himself with this idea, with his eyes unconsciously fixed upon her, when he found himself addressed by Sackville. "I know whom you are looking at," said the latter, in a whisper, "is not she charming?" Lacy started, and coloured, and almost mechanically assented. "I am glad you say so," pursued Sackville, in the same quiet tone, "for I have a high opinion of your judgment." Lacy thought the speech an odd one, and gave a quick, inquiring look at his companion, but returned no answer.

There was a short pause, during which, Lacy had been turning in his mind this trivial remark, which every instant seemed to increase in significance, and to be the precursor of something still more startling, when Sackville, putting his arm within his, proceeded, in the same con-

fidential whisper- "I believe," said he, speaking in his ear, "you have never heard of our engagement?"

"What engagement?" repeated Herbert, while an ominous chill ran through his frame.

"I mean," said Sackville, "our intended marriage."

The most terrible denunciation, hurled at Lacy, in a voice of thunder, could not have produced a more overpowering effect, than did these few simple words, so gently whispered in the tone of confidential friendship. He turned cold with agitation, and felt as if pulsation and breathing were for a while suspended. A dizziness seemed to seize him, and the lights and company swam confused before his eyes. He seemed to feel nothing but the hand of his rival upon his arm, and to hear only the low tones of his voice, though he knew not what he said, for all that followed those appalling words, "our intended marriage" had fallen unheeded on his ear.

With all this he preserved a painful consciousness of his situation; of the many eyes that were prepared to notice any outward expression of his feelings; of the necessity of concealing them from the view of Sackville; and the consequent necessity of external calmness; and also that he was required to return immediately a suitable reply to Sackville's communication.

To the performance of this painful task, he roused himself with difficulty, and promptly uttered something expressive of his surprise at his intelligence, and thanks for the early information; but in what terms these sentiments were couched he scarcely knew. Still he almost doubted the truth of what he had heard, and it began to appear like a horrible dream, when the ill-omened voice of Sackville, again awakened him to the sad reality.

"It has not long been settled," said he, "and is not generally known; but you are quite at liberty to mention it. When things of this kind are positively determined, I see no use in

making a mystery of them. It is better to be explicit. Do not you agree with me?"

Lacy assented.

"She concurs with me entirely on that point," pursued Sackville, looking at Agnes, and drawing Lacy gently towards the place where she was sitting; "and also with respect to appearing in public. Seclusion, you know, is much in vogue, in these cases; but I think it idle, and she is so good as to conform to my notions; and so you see here she is to-night. She is not well; but as she had decided upon coming, she did not like to change her purpose. I believe she was influenced partly by the fear of keeping me away. And now I have a little request to make. Do ask her to dance: I know she likes dancing, and she won't stand up with me, because I am suffering from a sprain. Under these circumstances, it is not every one we should approve of as a partner; but you are a friend, so let me propose you."

Lacy had nothing to object; and Sackville

instantly stepping up to Agnes, and leaning down towards her, said, "I hope you will dance. Pray do—dance with Lacy; he means to ask you. I have just told him every thing?"

She turned pale at this agitating proposal, but attempted no denial. Indeed at that moment her tongue refused to give utterance to any words; and her silence was taken by Sackville for acquiescence. He looked round at Lacy, who was standing near, like a criminal awaiting sentence; and who, on catching Sackville's eye, mechanically approached. At the same time, Agnes rose from her seat: not a syllable was said by either; and a slight inclination of the head, concluded the compact. Lacy offered his arm; she accepted it in silence; and they walked away together, to take their places in the quadrille set which was then being formed.

How effectually do the obligations of society, compel us to throw the mask of external calmness over feelings of inward anguish! and how imperfectly can we judge by the unruffled

exterior of those who tread with us the circle of the world, of the secret writhings of the spirit ! Little was it suspected by any of those who mingled with Agnes and Herbert in the dance, how agonizing, at that festive moment, were their respective feelings. In addition to the painfulness of meeting under such altered circumstances, Agnes was severely wounded by Herbert's having wished to dance with her, after knowing her engagement ; and she regretted that she had not refused him. What did his conduct seem to show ? That he had never cared for her ; that he had basely trifled with her affections ; and that he was inclined to continue his insidious attentions at a time when they became actually criminal. It might be, hereafter, a subject of thankfulness, that she had been timely saved from an union with such a man ; but this she could not feel at such a time, and the sense of his unworthiness, only planted another thorn in her bosom. To Herbert, still almost stupified with the shock of

this sudden announcement, the situation was terrible beyond description. He had looked forward with natural delight to the happy time when he might press the hand of Agnes in the dance. That time had now arrived, and under what circumstances ! He had felt her hand tremble as it rested on his arm. It might proceed from the embarrassing novelty of her situation ; it might be an indication that he was not indifferent to her. Yet if so, why was she another's ? And if it were so, what would it avail him ? His rival was a kind, confiding friend, who had saved his life at the hazard of his own ; and honour and gratitude forbad Lacy to endeavour to supplant him. He knew not whether Agnes was aware of his acquaintance with the altered circumstances under which they now met. He longed to apprize her of it, and to say that it was at the request of Sackville that he had ventured to claim her hand.

Once or twice, he was on the point of speaking to that effect, and the words were on his lips,

when fears would flash across his mind, and the time, the place, publicity, chance of being overheard, her probable embarrassment, perhaps displeasure; these and similar considerations, rose to his imagination, and diverted him from his half-formed purpose. In the delirium of the moment, he shunned the subject as something abhorrent to his nature, and strove to steep his senses in temporary forgetfulness. He would be, if possible, her gay, unthinking partner in the dance, and hide, even from her, the agony that dwelt within.

Little passed between them, and that little was rendered studiously light and irrelevant, and on his part even gay. Little did he know how the display of this miserable gaiety operated against him in her mind. She saw, indeed, that it did not sit easily upon him; but she attributed this his discomposure to the smittings of a conscience which reproached him for having trifled with her affections.

Had Lacy been less ardently attached, and

had the blow fallen less heavily upon him, he would probably have been alive to the impressions which his conduct might produce in her. But in him, feeling was too powerfully predominant, to allow caution and reflection to operate ; and his discerning faculties were blunted by the weight of this great calamity.

No allusion had yet been made to that circumstance which must annihilate the hopes of Lacy. He felt that it must soon be done, and yet he knew not when or how. Minute succeeded minute, and no present moment seemed appropriate to such a task. Hemmed round with smiling triflers, with light laughter ringing in his ear, and scraps of lively common-place, at each instant audible around him, how could he frame his mind to speak of that which seemed as it were to extinguish the very light of his existence ? As little would he in that scene of merriment have dwelt on the death of a dear relation.

The dance was ended ; he had re-conducted

Agnes to her seat ; and the opportunity seemed to be lost. He stood awhile irresolute before her, mustering a courage which now promised to be rather dangerous than useful. His mind was in a better frame for speaking to her on this agitating topic, and he was prepared to have conveyed in a few simple words his knowledge of her intended marriage, and wishes for her happiness. He had no longer a chance of saying any thing that should be heard by her alone ; but this he was now compelled to disregard, and he was about to bend forward to address her, when his arm was touched by a fan, and turning round he found himself accosted by his mother.

“ Oh, Herbert,” said Lady Lacy, “ I have been looking for you—come this way—I have something to say to you. How hot it is ! Have you been dancing ? Where is Emily ? ”

“ I have not seen my sister lately.”

“ Give me your arm ; I want to find her. What an excellent ball ! I have just been talk-

ing to the Dashwoods. Maria Dashwood looks so ill ! I wonder how they could think of bringing her ! Lady Dashwood says, she nodded to you just now, and you would not know her. I must take you to her to make your peace. By the bye, have you asked Charlotte Hartley to dance ?”

“ No, Ma’am, I have hardly seen her.”

“ Oh, then, do ! Indeed you ought,—and she has been sitting still, poor girl, all the last set. Are you engaged to any one now ?”

“ No.”

“ Oh, then, pray ask her ; there she is ; I am pretty sure she is not engaged.”

No more she was ; and as Lady Lacy continued to give him very broad hints in the hearing of the young lady, who evidently expected what was to follow, Herbert, however unwilling, could not without positive incivility, avoid leading her out. This, in the present state of his feelings, was to him a cruel penance. Miss Hartley was in lively spirits, and naturally ex-

pected a corresponding gaiety from her partner, and this gaiety, amidst the torments of anguish almost insupportable, did Lacy endeavour to assume. The topics too, which Miss Hartley chose to introduce, were often of such a nature as to be peculiarly distressing.

“How Miss Morton is fallen off!” said she, after looking at the dejected countenance of Agnes. “Don’t you think so, Mr. Lacy?”

“She is rather young to fall off,” said Lacy; “she only happens not to be well.”

“Ah, perhaps it is that, or perhaps it is her dress. She is certainly not well dressed to-night—though perhaps she would not look well, if she *was* well dressed; and yet still, I don’t know, after all, whether it is not the dress that makes all the difference. What do you think, Mr. Lacy?”

“I am no judge in a question of dress.”

“Oh, yes, you are, if you would but think so. I cannot say Miss Morton strikes me as being so very, very handsome. She is not one

of my beauties. Only look at Augusta Tyrwhitt ; she is really perfectly lovely. There is no comparison between her and Miss Morton."

"They are very different indeed," said Lacy, and turned his head to avoid the pursuance of so unpleasant a theme.

Supper was soon announced ; and Herbert, as in duty bound, conducted Miss Hartley thither, and sat by her at the table. Scarcely were they seated, and had begun to look about them, than Herbert discovered, to his sorrow, that Agnes and Sackville were situated directly opposite. To assume, under any circumstances, an unrestrained and cheerful manner, was now a painful task to Lacy ; but to be exposed to their observation was a ten-fold aggravation of his misery.

Nor was the evil less to Agnes, who, though she thought at first that nothing could lessen the misfortune of being again subjected to the agitating presence of Lacy, would rather have seen him seated by any one than Charlotte

Hartley. This young lady was in excellent spirits, and Agnes internally reproached herself for repining at her happiness. Lacy also wishing to divert his thoughts, and sensible of the necessity of concealing for the present what he felt, exerted himself to talk to Miss Hartley ; and this appearance of marked attention, which was not unobserved by Agnes, tended only to confirm her in a belief of his utter want of regard for her, and of the truth of his reported engagement to that lady.

The necessity of a further interview with Agnes, continued to press with increasing force on Lacy's mind ; and every minute brought fresh wonder, that hopes so vitally dear to him, should have been dismissed without a word. An opportunity was now eagerly sought ; and the supper being ended, and he at length disencumbered of his partner, it was his first endeavour to find Agnes out. In a large house, with many rooms thrown open, and full of company, this was not an easy task ; and, difficult, in

truth, did Lacy find it. In his perambulations, he was first arrested by Lady Rodborough, who charged him with a little mission into the ball room ; and he was then fastened upon by Lady Appleby, from whose elegant superabundance of civil sayings, there was little chance of immediate escape.

“ I do hope, Mr. Lacy,” she said, with a plaintive look of expostulation, “ that you have no immediate intention of running away from this delightful ball ; for, indced, I must say that it has gone off remarkably well, and has been very fully and numerously attended : and must, I am sure, have been highly satisfactory to both Lord and Lady Rodborough, as indeed, Lady Rodborough told me herself ; for she said, that they had had several disappointments, and never expected to have had the pleasure of seeing so many of their friends about them ; and now that they are here, I am sure I hope they will not think of breaking up so early, for that would be a thousand pities—and indeed, I

must say that I think very few have actually ordered their carriages yet—at least, I know that only half of our party have any immediate intention of going. Mr. Morton, and myself, and Elizabeth, and Augusta, will probably stay some time; and indeed the others would not go if it were not that Miss Morton feels rather overcome with the heat, and is not equal ——”

“Is Miss Morton going?” exclaimed Lacy.

“Yes, she is, and Lord Appleby, and ——”

Lacy would not stay to hear the enumeration of those who were to accompany her; and trusting that Lady Appleby’s good nature would forgive the abruptness of his departure, hastily passed on, fearing that the opportunity might even now be lost, and vowing that if it were possible he would speak to Agnes again that night. He re-entered the anti-room—she was not there, nor in the saloon—she was probably gone to the entrance hall. He asked a servant, who met him in the corridor, if Mr. Morton’s

carriage was called. "No, Sir," was the answer, and the man passed on.

Lacy felt relieved from a great part of his anxiety, and was on the point of turning back, when the call of "Lord Appleby's carriage stops the way," caught his ear, which was immediately followed by the information that Lord Appleby was coming down. It instantly struck him that Agnes was going in that carriage, and that his exertions were indeed fruitless. There was no use in proceeding, yet he could not be satisfied without being assured by ocular proof of her actual departure. He entered the hall, saw a carriage at the door, with the step let down, and Sackville handing in a lady, whom, as her face was turned from him and her head enveloped in a hood, he could not distinguish; but who he doubted not was Agnes. In another minute the carriage was gone, and Lacy returned in useless regret to the ball-room.

Lady Lacy was in no haste to return ; and for another hour did Herbert endure the misery of feeling himself obliged to wear the galling mask of cheerfulness, and to talk and smile, while his mind was afflicted with a more poignant sorrow than he had yet known.

At length, he was released from this state of torment ; and never did prisoner quit his dungeon more willingly than he escaped from the splendid mansion of Westcourt. Little was said on the way home, for he pretended sleep, that he might muse in silence over the events of the past evening.

CHAPTER VII.

True generosity rises above the ordinary rules of social conduct, and flows with much too full a stream to be comprehended within the precise marks of formal precepts. It sanctifies every passion, and adds grace to every acquisition of the soul; and if it does not necessarily include, at least, it reflects a lustre upon the whole circle of moral and intellectual qualities.

MELMOTH—*Fitzosborne's Letters.*

AFTER a night of feverish sleep, Lacy awoke to a melancholy recollection of the past, and an anxious consideration of the steps which it now remained for him to take. His final determination was to see Agnes, if possible, that morning, and to defer all communication to his father, till he could also relate to him the result of the interview.

At breakfast Herbert met Sir William, who doubting not that his son had passed an evening

of the most unmixed gratification, assailed him with many sportive remarks and questions which it was distressing to receive, and difficult to answer. Agitated by these unconscious attacks, Herbert withdrew himself as soon as possible ; and being eager to arrive at a clearer understanding of the terms on which he and Agnes were henceforth to meet, rode over to Dodswell. On arriving there, he was told that Mr. Morton and Sackville were not at home ; neither were the ladies, “ who,” added the servant, “ are out walking.”

As the man said this, Herbert cast his eyes towards the shrubbery ; and at the same time, caught a glimpse of a female figure at a distance, which he immediately conceived to be Agnes. It disappeared almost as soon as it was visible ; but it was sufficient to determine his course ; and giving his horse to the servant, he set out in quest of her.

Agnes, who had suffered much, and who felt constrained to assume tranquillity in the pre-

sence of Sackville and her father, was ineffectually endeavouring to allay the fever of her mind in a solitary walk; and Sackville, who understood her feelings, had considerably abstained from intruding his society when he knew she wished to be alone. Walking slowly to and fro in a sequestered alley of the shrubbery, earnestly did she endeavour to collect her scattered thoughts. In many various lights did she consider the conduct of Lacy, in which there was much that she did not understand.—That he should have received, so coolly, tidings which, if his former manner were any thing but the most hollow and frivolous gallantry, ought to have cost him such a pang!—That it should instantly have been followed by a request of her hand, as if their situations were still unchanged! That he should have uttered not one syllable in allusion to this startling event!—these were all subjects of sorrow and surprise. His silence, it is true, might be interpreted favourably. An indifferent person would, perhaps, have whis-

pered some formula of congratulation ; one who felt deeply could not. His manner, too, was far from being cheerful and composed ; and though there were gleams of gaiety in it, it was a forced unnatural gaiety, as if assumed to conceal his real feelings.

These considerations again induced her to believe that Lacy really cared for her. Then again would she reproach herself for questioning on such a subject : she was the affianced bride of another, and must learn to forget that Lacy had ever held a place in her heart. Then arose a consideration still more serious, whether she were justified, with her affections thus disposed, in accepting the hand of another ; whether she could fulfil her marriage vow, and could offer other than an imperfect pledge and a divided love.

“ I know not,” said she ; “ these are points which I cannot argue with the coolness of an uninterested reasoner ; but I sincerely trust that this sacrifice of my best affections will not be

blameable in the sight of Heaven. If I cannot love as I could wish, him whose lot I shall engage to follow, still I trust I shall so fulfil the duties of a wife, that he shall never have cause to reproach me for any want of due affection. If my sentiments are erroneous, on my head will the misery fall; and I can never lose the satisfaction of feeling, that by the sacrifice of my own happiness, I have saved my parents from misfortune. As for Lacy, be his sentiments what they may, there remains no course but to forget him."

She was mournfully repeating to herself this last resolution, when approaching footsteps caught her ear. She turned, and Lacy stood before her. The ardour of impatient search had flushed his cheek, while that of Agnes was pale as death. It was for both an agitating moment, and to Lacy scarcely less than to Agnes, though he it was that sought the interview. He was the first to speak.

"I was told," said he, in a voice that trem-

bled with emotion, "that you were here, and I came in search of you."

"My father is not here," replied Agnes, scarcely knowing what she said, yet feeling with instinctive delicacy, that she ought not to be the object of Lacy's visit. "I am afraid I cannot tell you where he is. Was your visit to him—or——" she could not utter the name of Sackville.

"It was you, I wished to see," said Lacy. "I missed you last night—unexpectedly—otherwise, I should have mentioned—should have asked—what I will ask now. Is it true?" said he, lowering his voice to a deep earnest whisper; "is that true which I heard last night?"

She understood his meaning, though it was imperfectly expressed. She trembled with agitation; and the words "Quite true," alone escaped her lips.

A distressing silence followed her reply. Each was conscious that, in the hurry of the moment, they had allowed their tone and manner to

express too plainly their real feelings ; and Lacy became aware that the abruptness of his address could be excused on no other ground.

“ Pray forgive me,” he said, “ if I offend you—I hardly know what I am saying—I know that I owe you an apology. Last night—what must you have thought of me ! that under such circumstances, I should have shown so little delicacy as to claim your hand ! to lead you out to observation ! *I* too ! but *he* wished it, or I should not have presumed. It was kindly meant—it was a mark of his confidence ; for he did not know—But ! I am wandering ; I am going to tell what you should not know any more than he—but no matter—disguise is impossible—I will tell you all.”

“ No, Mr. Lacy—no,” exclaimed Agnes, turning from him. “ Tell me nothing, I entreat you ; I have no wish—no right to know. Remember my situation, and respect it. The time is past—I cannot—must not hear what you would say.”

“Then you can guess what I would say?” replied Lacy, eagerly. “Yes, I see you understand me. You can believe that mine was no unmeaning preference, no heartless, frivolous attention. You can believe that, whatever I had been required to sacrifice to ensure your happiness, I would”——

“Enough, enough,” cried Agnes. “Yes, I can believe it all; but this is no fit subject for us now. Pray leave me, Mr. Lacy. No good can come from such a conversation. Go, I entreat you; and take with you every wish for your future happiness that I am permitted to form.”

Lacy walked away a few paces, as if about to obey her bidding; then stood irresolute awhile; then in another moment had returned, and was once more at her side.

“It is not a week,” said he, “since I met you in that house, and was permitted to intimate, if not by words, at least by manner, the presumptuous expectations which I had formed. I will not blame you, Miss Morton, for not

having then assumed a severity of air which is foreign to the charitableness of your disposition. But had I been then repulsed, however harshly, I feel that I should have been spared much of the pain of this great and unexpected blow—nay, Miss Morton—pray hear me—grant me this little recompence, though it may be somewhat irksome. I should have been spared not only this terrible surprise, but the consciousness that I had incurred the risk of giving pain to the very admirable person to whom you will be united. You probably know how much I owe him—indeed I remember to have told you—and I can now call to mind that you endeavoured to abate what you considered the excess of my gratitude. Perhaps you thought that I said more than I truly felt—but indeed it was not so—and my actions shall now prove it; and you shall see that I can look forward with calmness and satisfaction to my friend's happiness, even when it is attended with the sacrifice of my own.”

His voice faltered slightly as he pronounced

these last words, and he stopped for a while to regain firmness and composure. Agnes uttered not a word ; she was very pale ; her respiration almost ceased ; she thought herself on the point of fainting, and leaned against a tree for support.

“ I have a question,” resumed Lacy, “ one serious question to ask you, and, if you are at liberty, I solemnly entreat you to answer it, for you will thereby enable me to discharge an act of justice. I would ask you,” continued he, lowering his voice, which was almost choked with emotion, “ does Sackville, according to your belief, know or even think that I have, however involuntarily, been at any time his rival ? It is a bold question, but I trust you will forgive it ; pray answer it, if you may.”

“ I do not believe,” said Agnes, in a voice that was scarcely articulate, “ that he has ever thought you such.”

“ I am glad of it,” exclaimed Lacy, after a short pause ; “ and may he never think so.

He must wish to be my friend, and I would spare him the pain of believing that he has unintentionally been my enemy. I thought that he perhaps suspected what my views had been, and that he had therefore granted me last night the privilege of your hand as the highest mark of his confidence. If it were so, I thank him for trusting that I should never attempt to resist his claims. He shall see that his confidence has not been misplaced. I have not known him very long; but I can feel and admire his superior qualities. But it is useless for me to praise him to you. You can appreciate him much better than I can. I have been too bold; but when the heart is very full—forgive my abruptness—I cannot say all I would—may God bless you both—farewell!”

He turned away as, with a faltering voice, he uttered these last words; but he felt as if he would fain say more, and seemed rooted to the spot, unable to quit her dangerous presence.

At this moment, approaching footsteps were

heard, and before either was conscious of it, Sackville had joined them. A short glance at their countenances sufficed to tell him, that an agitating interview had taken place, and it was a circumstance calculated to impart no slight agitation to the breast of Sackville. But he had great powers of self-command ; and, smothering all external trace of the jealous suspicions which then flashed across his mind, he advanced with all the alacrity of cheerful friendship to welcome Lacy, who, on being greeted, awoke as from a trance. Sackville's calmness seemed to be momentarily imparted to him. He regained his self-possession, repressed his emotion, and could reply to the questions and remarks of his companion with collectedness, and apparent ease ; while Sackville, offering one arm to Agnes, and putting the other within that of Lacy, walked between them to the house.

The conversation, in which Sackville purposely relieved them by taking himself the greater share, was light and unimportant, and related

chiefly to the last night's ball, and the persons present at it. At the same time, it was guarded with admirable tact from containing any allusion harassing to the feelings of Agnes and Lacy. Yet the restraint under which these feelings were now suppressed was in itself acutely painful; and when at length they reached the house, Agnes eagerly quitted them, to give vent to her sorrows in the solitude of her own apartment.

Agitated, harassed, oppressed as she had been, she had not yet shed one tear. But when she found herself alone, and free from the restraint of others' presence, she ceased to maintain the dreadful struggle, and wept long and bitterly. At first she scarcely knew for what she wept. There was one dark mingled tissue of misery, one vague oppressive gloom which gathered around her, and seemed to weigh her to the earth; and left her only an undefined sensation of being inconsolably wretched—she was hardly conscious how or why. But as her

mind grew more composed it awoke to the perception of distinct sources of grief. She found that the fancied barrier by which she had purposed to exclude Lacy from her thoughts had vanished since their last meeting, and that, instead of being an unmeaning trifler, who cared not for her, and whom it was an act of justice to forget, he was one who nourished a sincere attachment, who was keenly wounded by her seeming fickleness, whom she had cruelly wronged, and whose generous conduct had produced for him a still greater portion of her admiration. All the considerations through which she had steeled herself to the sacrifice, had proved ungrounded, and nothing remained to uphold her courage but a stern sense of duty.

We must return to Lacy, whom Agnes left alone with Sackville. His situation was rendered less trying by her absence; and he had time to call to aid his natural strength of mind, and to speak with firmness and composure on that which was to him the most afflicting of all

subjects. Sackville was even surprised at the steadiness of his tone; and wishing to avoid any thing like an explanation, was very willing to lead the conversation to other things. But Lacy had no wish to shun the one great topic which was uppermost in his mind, and voluntarily offered his congratulations.

“Sackville,” said he, “I have reason to be very grateful to you, and I should have a bad opinion of myself if I did not wish you every earthly happiness. I think you have made such a choice as can hardly fail to ensure it. It may perhaps be presumptuous for me to praise Miss Morton, short as my acquaintance with her has been; but so much as this I will say: May you both ever contribute to each other’s happiness!” and he wrung his companion’s hand, and left him.

Sackville, during this last interview, had been touched with a momentary compunction. There is no magnet, which attracts our sympathy more powerfully than generosity; and the

brightness of this trait in Lacy, had penetrated even to the cold obdurate heart of Sackville. And yet he well knew beforehand this property of his friend's disposition, and had deliberately planned to turn his very virtues into arms that should operate against him. He had calculated with detestable subtilty, the hold which a former act of preservation would give him over his grateful heart; and he hoped to bind the tie still stronger, by studied friendliness of manner, and early confidence on the subject of his engagement. Sackville had not, like many bad men, a disbelief in the virtue of others. He could accurately foresee the virtuous line of conduct which they would take; but he viewed it coolly and speculatively, as the result of a certain temperament, or disposition of character, not much more admirable, or intrinsically moral, than their devotion to any one pursuit, and almost equally resolvable into whim. Yet in spite of this callousness of feeling, he could not but be somewhat moved by

the generosity of his much injured rival ; and he felt for a while, that inward pang, which comes ever and anon to shake the triumph even of successful guilt.

CHAPTER VIII.

Suspicious among thoughts, are like bats among birds ; they ever fly by twilight.

BACON.

LACY repaired from these trying scenes, to the still remaining painful task of acquainting his father with the sudden downfall of his hopes. The expression of his countenance, as he entered the room, sufficiently prepared Sir William for the evil tidings that were to follow.

“Where have you been?” said the latter, looking anxiously at his son.

“To Dodswell,” replied Herbert ; and then, without further preface, in a few simple words, he described the discovery of the preceding

night, and the interview which he had undergone that morning.

“It is a strange affair,” said the Baronet, when his son had finished his painful recital, “and I cannot understand it. It is but a week, Herbert, since I saw you both together : I could then have sworn that she felt a preference for you ; and if this was not the case, and my old judgment is deceived by modern manners, still I must think her more deficient in discernment, than the very weakest of her sex, not to perceive that you betrayed a more than common admiration for her ; yet never could I see, that she repelled or received your attentions coldly—no, not even in the presence of Sackville ; nor did he seem jealous, or uneasy. And yet, under the circumstances, what else could have been expected ? I cannot understand it, Herbert : but answer me one thing—do you believe that she is really attached to Sackville ?”

“I have seen no symptoms of attachment,” replied Herbert ; “indeed, all that I have seen

and heard, except this startling fact of their actual engagement, leads me to conclude the contrary. I can remember, that once at Huntley, she spoke of him rather coldly—could that be artifice? No! no, she is superior to artifice. Yet that was scarce two months since, and surely betokened nothing like increasing attachment. In fact, both at the ball, and this morning, she seemed unhappy—deeply so, as if there were something on her mind. It is a mystery, quite a mystery; I cannot understand it.”

Both were silent for a while, and seemed to be pondering on the peculiarities of the case. Sir William was the first to speak. “I do not pretend,” said he, “to solve the mystery completely, but I cannot stifle my suspicions. There has been some trick, some juggle. She has been sacrificed to Sackville.”

“Good heavens, Sir!—but how? and why?”

“Nay, I know no more than you. I judge only from your description, and from what I observed of her manner last week. I cannot

help thinking that the poor girl has been driven into this match, against her will. She is a wealthy prize, and Sackville is one of her trustees, and he must know, that she is well worth winning, be she attached to him or not."

"It is just possible," said Herbert; "but I should be unwilling to think, that Sackville would lend himself to such a transaction."

"So should I, Herbert, and though your opinion may be false, I like to hear you express it. A proneness to suspicion is least commendable in a young man; and I am glad to see that you have no disposition, to think worse of others, than you can help. Sackville has been, on one occasion, a valuable friend to you; and I shall ever hope for an opportunity of showing him the gratitude that a father ought to feel. Perhaps I have betrayed a want of this, in allowing myself to entertain injurious suspicions of him; but remember that I have received no pledge of his virtues except your praise, and *that*, when your affections are prepossessed, is

apt to be somewhat lavishly bestowed. But we will not pursue this subject. It only gives you needless pain; and our speculations upon it are utterly unavailing. Miss Morton, whether willingly or not, has engaged to give her hand to another, and it is not for us to interfere. I wish I could give you any comfort or assistance. I believe silence is the best balm; and let me assure you, my dear Herbert, that I will never henceforward wound you, by wantonly dragging forth your disappointment as a subject for my discussion: but, at the same time believe me when I say, that my ears will always be open to the slightest syllable, you may choose to utter."

Here the subject was dropped, and, as it seemed to both parties, was never again to be resumed. Sir William Lacy, though he felt compassion for the afflictions of his son, was not eventually sorry to see him precluded from forming a connection which he had so many

reasons for disliking; and notwithstanding the opposite tendency of his just suspicions, he chose to take it for granted that Miss Morton was irrevocably lost to Herbert. Nor did Herbert himself think otherwise; for even when he admitted the tempting supposition that Agnes might, by possibility, secretly prefer him to Sackville, and that a trifling exertion on his part would enable him to supplant his rival, still he recoiled with generous firmness from such a plan, when he reflected that this rival was the man to whose prompt exertions he had owed his life.

About a fortnight now elapsed without any further communication between the families at Lacy and Dodswell; nor did any tidings reach the former respecting the Mortons, or any of their connections, except an announcement which the baronet made one morning to his son, that Lord Rodborough, as he was informed, in a note from Allen, had concluded the purchase of

the Bloxwich estate. "Here is the note," said the Baronet; and Herbert took it, and read it through.

"There is one part," said he, "which I don't understand; 'I am glad that my hint was not thrown away.' What does he refer to?"

"Heaven knows," said the baronet, carelessly; "I hope it was that I should burn his letter, for I certainly did it—half read. Come, Herbert, don't put on that long expostulating face—I know what you mean—and if I was not exempted, *jure paterno*, you would read me a lecture on carelessness in matters of business; but it would be of no use—it would not convert me—I hate your precisions in petty affairs."

Not long after the time when this conversation took place, a meeting was convened at the County Hall, at ———, for the purpose of petitioning parliament for the speedy abolition of slavery. Sir William, who had been reading a good deal on that subject, had warmed himself, by a course of pamphlets, into a strong feel-

ing of interest ; and Herbert, who let slip no opportunity of drawing his father from his retirement, and inducing him to associate more freely with his neighbours, gladly took advantage of the present bias of his mind to engage him to attend the meeting. They accordingly went ; and Herbert, who was solicitous to wean himself from his own distresses, by fixing his attention upon other objects, would have received much gratification from its proceedings, had not the consciousness of one circumstance, of a different nature, soon become painfully obtrusive. Once before, at a general muster of the gentlemen of the county, Herbert had been pained, by observing the very little consideration in which his father seemed to be held. Remembering this, he was, in the present instance, rather curious to see whether any improvement manifested itself in the cordiality with which he was received by his neighbours : but he saw, to his sorrow, that their general demeanour was, by no means, more favourable, and that there were

now instances of actual avoidance which amounted almost to rudeness, and even in the very persons who had formerly shown some degree of courtesy.

Mr. Morton, in particular, guardedly abstained, throughout the meeting, from exchanging a word, or even look, with Sir William Lacy or his son. Herbert was a good deal hurt at this, though he could easily conceive that the susceptible temper of Mr. Morton might have discovered some ground of offence which would awaken his former grudge: the cause, however, of a similar coldness in others, was utterly beyond his comprehension. It was a subject in which delicacy forbid him to make any observations to his father, who was evidently chagrined at the reception he had experienced; and though he endeavoured to laugh it off in a vein of caustic pleasantry, was, in reality, deeply mortified.

The treatment which he had received rendered him still more averse to society; the

neighbourhood became hateful to him ; every man, in Sir William's imagination, seemed to be his enemy ; and with a morose stubbornness of determination, which in him was unusual, he refused to appear, or admit any visitors to his house, during the great annual assemblage of the principal families of the county, at the Henbury races, which were to take place in a few days. His refusal was the more extraordinary, and was the more strenuously combatted by Lady Lacy, because their son-in-law, Charles Hartley, was to be one of the stewards—the other steward was Lord Malvern.

CHAPTER IX.

Strange though it seem—yet, with extremest grief
Is link'd a mirth—it doth not bring relief—
That playfulness, of sorrow ne'er beguiles,
And smiles in bitterness—but still it smiles.

BYRON.

At length the first day of the races arrived. Hartley, whose office obliged him to be on the spot, was staying in Henbury with his wife and sister ; and on the morning of the first day, Lady Lacy and Herbert went with them, and some other friends, to the course.

England presents few more animating or characteristic spectacles than that truly national one, a race-course. What a medley of objects does it comprise ! The neat light stand ; the tent-like booths ; the grotesque shapes of caravans, with their broad display of painted canvas,

well peopled with glaring monsters; the high and ever moving swings; the carriages of every form, hue, and denomination, from the coroneted coach and six to the humble donkey-cart, or the uncouth waggon, with its twenty insides—while the formal barricades which line the course, crown with an air of order the seeming irregularity of the whole.

But how great is the addition to this *coup d'œil*, if we take some note of the animated objects that fill the picture! The bright array of figures, gleaming from the balcony of the stand—the humbler throng that move below—the horsemen and their steeds—the miscellaneous concourse of pedestrians—motley coloured tumblers—honest blue-stockinged countrymen, in grey or russet—the liveried figures dispersed among the mass, and contrasting their gay dresses with the coarser habiliments of the mob. Nor must we forget the recruiting party, which seldom fails to swell the crowd—the drum and fife, and stately sergeant at the head—and a long

train of ill-starred youths, with colours in their hats, trying to assume a martial strut, though looking half repentant of their bargain.

But what is the pictorial pleasure arising from such a scene, compared with the interest of that event, which seems at once to fill every head and strain every eye, whether of the youthful beauty in the stand, or the grave, cool *black-leg* above stairs !

The countless throng are about to be repaid for a long period of expectation : a bell has been heard—they are saddling the horses—in a few minutes, two appear, and gallop towards the stand. The race must be begun—no—they are soon pulled in, and walked back—and then two more appear in sight—and then another—and still another, and are similarly paraded before the spectators ; while cards are studied with increased attention, and blue, and red, and buff, and orange, assigned to their respective owners. Then, one by one, they all walk back—and, at some distance from the stand, a crowd appears

to be forming itself; and horsemen flock in eager haste from various points to this one quarter. Then expectation begins to be more strongly painted in every face, and there is an increased stillness in the crowd. Then again, a bell is sounded, and is followed by a stillness deeper than before. Then, all at once is heard on every side a low murmur; one single sentence bursts simultaneously from the assembled multitude; and "They are off!" is exclaimed at the same instant by a thousand tongues. The crowd divides, and six horses sweep in line from the distance-post towards the stand.

The equality is not long preserved—before two hundred yards are traversed, one is far ahead—the two next run almost abreast; then follow the others successively; and the favourite is last but one. Soon the leading horse begins to slacken his speed, and the three first are close together—the struggle is now between these; and the vaunted favourite succeeds only in passing the fourth. But every instant, the

aspect of the race is altered. The horse which led, is now third ; and the contest for pre-eminence is confined to two. More than half the course is traversed—the two first are far ahead—and the favourite only abreast of the third horse. He cannot win. 'Tis “ the two first against the field ” for any odds. And now you may offer to name the winner, for one of the two is a length ahead, while the favourite is third, and several yards behind the second. They approach the distance post, and the race is still between those two—no—one has failed completely, and has dropped at once, not only far behind the first, but even behind the favourite also.

And now the latter is perceived to gain gradually on the first horse—he is three lengths behind—two—one—and now, you say he has a chance—but, no—he does not seem to gain any longer upon the other, whose rider, dressed in yellow, whips hard and keeps his station. The rider of the favourite does not whip—he seems

to be pulling in—perhaps he knows that he must lose—it is but thirty yards to the winning chair. A shout is heard of “yellow wins!” and “blue for a thousand!” and the roar is tremendous, and “blue, blue!” is the prevailing cry.

In another second, all is decided—blue all at once lets out his horse—the effect is instantaneous—he passes the other like a shot, within a few yards of the winning chair—“blue,” is shouted louder than ever, and all is lively exclamation; and your excited feelings (if a novice) are not cooled till, on turning, with loud commendations on the excellent race, to the experienced man of the turf at your elbow, you are told, with a quiet smile, that it was a hollow thing from the first; that the yellow never had a chance; and that blue held in all the time, and might have won by half a distance.

Such was the scene which was presented on the Henbury race-course on the first day, when Herbert Lacy attended the stand. Our descrip-

tion of it is not such as would have come from him ; but is rather that of a novice, much amused, and strictly attentive to the peculiarities of the scene before him. But, in Herbert's case, feelings of another kind now filled his thoughts, and prevented him from experiencing that lively interest which he generally took in all that was passing around him. He knew it was probable that he might here again meet Agnes ; and though he had no doubts with respect to the line of conduct which he ought to take, he felt that it would be difficult to assume the unembarrassed cheerfulness of mere acquaintanceship.

Agnes was almost the first person he saw, as he entered the stand with Charlotte Hartley hanging on his arm. The reports of their supposed engagement had never reached him, or this circumstance would have given him some uneasiness. Agnes was at that time sitting rather remote from him, surrounded by persons, most of whom he knew only by name ;

and as Herbert, however anxious to accost her, was careful to avoid all approach to familiarity of manner, he first addressed himself to such acquaintance as lay more immediately in his way.

Having gone through the necessary course of greetings, with persons whom he was neither glad nor sorry to see, he gradually moved towards that quarter of the room where Agnes was sitting. When he first entered, she had been grave ; but now he found her in lively spirits, talking, as it appeared, gaily and amusingly to those around her.

This was not quite what he expected, and he was rather disturbed at its want of harmony with the state of his own feelings. He did not wish her to betray to the world her sense of the peculiarity of their situation : but as she knew what he had suffered on her account, he thought that in his presence she need not have been quite so cheerful. In this reproachful mood did he advance to speak to her, striving, in

bitterness of heart, to mould his features into the same air of cheerfulness, and hoping that he should at least be rewarded by a cordial address.

But Agnes was in no haste to notice him. Her whole mind at that moment seemed to be engaged in the formation of a lottery, and she was trying to obtain a pair of scissars to cut up a card.

“Who will befriend me?” said she, looking round as Lacy drew near; “I know I must apply to a gentleman—no lady carries any thing half so useful. Mr. Luscombe—oh, thank you—what an excellent friend you are! You are like the man in Peter Schlemihl, with the inexhaustible pockets—don’t bow, for it is not a compliment. Thank you, Mr. Lacy, they are quite well. Who is our treasurer?—My father is not here this morning.—Are Sir William and Lady Lacy here?—Now, Mr. Sedley, you may draw.”

And then, without bestowing another look on

Lacy, she went on with lively conversation, to her other acquaintance, about the arrangements of their lottery.

Lacy was surprised and mortified. A sense of the awkwardness of his situation, added, perhaps, not a little to his distress. He had introduced himself, for the sake of accosting her, into the centre of a large group of persons, whom, with the exception of Luscombe, he did not know; and when she refused to attend to him, he had no longer any one to address. He stood for a short time, a silent spectator of their proceedings, and then, feeling himself an intruder in the circle, he turned round and walked away. He retired with no enviable feelings. He entertained for the moment, strong displeasure against Agnes, the stronger, perhaps, from the ardency of his attachment; for a slight wounds more severely, in proportion to our regard for the person that offers it.

But this sentiment was soon changed into vexation at his own behaviour. Why so in-

prudently eager to address her? Why introduce himself into a group of persons, amongst whom she alone could be the object of his attention? Was this his delicacy? This his caution? Would his avoidance have offended her, or argued indifference? No, she would acknowledge the propriety of his course; and there had passed *that* at their last meeting, which no trifling omission of common-place ceremony, could cause her to forget. All this he could admit; but still he was offended at her liveliness of manner. It might, it was true, be assumed; but still, why to such excess? Alas! he did not reflect, that it was no easy task for Agnes to regulate the display of her fictitious gaiety.

Plunged in these harassing ruminations, he stood apparently listless and unobservant in the midst of the cheerful scene around him. He tried at length to arouse himself to the enjoyment of the present moment. He succeeded in personating the calm observer; heard the buz

of conversation, and could catch such imperfect scraps as the following.

“Mr. Sackville—Miss Morton—engaged long before she came out.”—“Hartley, what did you do at Doncaster?”—“I did not *do*, I was *done*.”—“How d’ye do, Lady Appleby?”—“Quite well, thank you—particularly sorry—quite delighted—so much obliged.”—“Good races, Lord Appleby.”—“Why—a—yes—but, between ourselves, I—”—“Who is that?”—“I must ask Mrs. Poole.”—“That? oh, his name is”—(inaudible)—“Rich?”—“Very, his father kept a lottery office—one must not inquire how money comes or goes either, in these sort of places.”—“Mr. Luscombe, might I beg.”—“Too happy—pray allow me.”—“Midhurst, what did you kill on the moors?”—“Forty brace of grouse, and a setter.”—“Pretty.”—“Paints.”—“Must be natural.”—“No, I assure you—rouges sily — ‘blooms unseen,’ as the poet says.”—“What have you drawn?”—“Lord Rodborough’s Artaxomines.”—“Been drawn already

—does not run.”—“Tell me—do—what is a handicap?”—“A handicap, Miss Tyrwhitt? oh, a handicap is——”—“I am sorry to hear it—should be careful—might have been distanced.”—“Party from Westcourt.”—“Seven to four.”—“Marriage talked of.”—“Birds wild.”—“Candlelight beauty”—“Ordinary before dusk.—”

Dissatisfied with all about him, Lacy strove to beguile the irksomeness of the time by change of scene; and soon quitted the stand for the winning chair, where, amongst others, he found the stewards, his brother-in-law, and Lord Malvern, “*L’Allegro*,” and “*Il Penseroso*,” as they had been not unaptly named. Hartley was, as usual, all life and good humour, and would soon have raised the spirits of Lacy, almost to their customary level, had not the cold and distant manner of Lord Malvern rather pained and surprised him. Lord Malvern had much natural reserve; but with Lacy, whom he seemed to like, he had been accustomed to

throw it off; and his altered behaviour in the present instance, was consequently calculated to cause the latter some uneasiness.

Another circumstance occurred, at the same time, which, though slight, made rather a strong impression on Lacy. While in the steward's stand, he saw Mr. Morton crossing the course, as if with the intention of coming there also. When he was close to it, Lord Malvern, who was leaning over, spoke to him, and Lacy understood him to answer, that he was coming to join their party. Mr. Morton was at the foot of the steps, when Lacy suddenly changed his position, and as the former looked up, their eyes met. At that instant, Mr. Morton seemed to Lacy, to check himself; turned his head quickly in another direction; looked up and down the line of carriages, as if searching for somebody; and then, all at once, as if having found the object of his search, walked hastily away.

Lacy followed him with his eyes, and per-

ceived, that instead of going in the direction in which he seemed to look, he returned again, after taking a circuitous route, to the stand. There was little in his conduct, that would have excited observation, had not Lacy been predisposed to attach an interest and importance to all his movements. Lord Malvern and Hartley, neither of them made any remark ; no more did Lacy : but he thought much, and inferred that Mr. Morton had been studying to avoid him, which opinion contributed not a little to swell the aggregate of painful feelings which that morning had produced.

CHAPTER X.

Beware

Of entrance to a quarrel ; but being in,
Bear it, that the opposer may beware of thee.

Hamlet.

AFTER quitting the course, Lacy repaired to the ordinary, and from thence, after two or three hours of forced joviality, he gladly proceeded to the ball. This ball was a great event in the county, and usually produced a numerous assemblage of the country families, for many miles round. It was generally pronounced to be well attended, and it was so on the present occasion. The Rodboroughs had lent all their consequence to dignify Lord Malvern's stewardship ; and Hartley, though little supported, either by his own or his wife's relations, had, by

dint of activity, and his own popularity, secured a considerable attendance of his particular acquaintance; and had especially deserved the thanks of the chaperons for bringing so large a number of young men. Herbert went to the ball as one of Hartley's party; and, as might have been expected, the two stewards, with their immediate friends, were among the first arrivals.

A large room, ill filled, is always a melancholy sight; and such was this when Lacy entered it. It contained scarcely any but Lord Malvern's party, who were in a group together at the further end, and comprised, in addition to many others, Lord and Lady Rodborough, the Ladies Sedley, Lady Malvern, Sackville, Agnes Morton, and her father. Hartley, who preceded the others, had already, when Lacy came in, paid his respects to this assemblage, and had now returned to his own set, which formed a corresponding group at the other end of the room.

The Rodborough family were not eminently

popular. They had the reputation, among their country neighbours, of being fine and fastidious, which was true of all except Lord Malvern, whose cold, reserved habits, nevertheless, caused him to be unjustly charged with the greatest proportion of this failing. The Hartleys' party, therefore, though bearing no ill-will towards the Rodboroughs, did not feel inclined to traverse the whole extent of a long room for the purpose of accosting persons from whom they were by no means secure of a cordial reception. The same feeling, in some degree, withheld Lacy, who, though he might no longer seek the society of Agnes, and could take no pleasure in that of Sackville, would not so long have held back had it not been for the unpleasant doubts conveyed to his mind by the manner of Lord Malvern and Mr. Morton towards him that morning. It was, therefore, natural that he should shrink from approaching a circle in which his reception was so doubtful, and in which,

at any rate, the presence of Agnes must awaken agitating thoughts.

By degrees, however, the room began to fill—the formidable blanks were lessened—and on Hartley moving upwards to concert measures for a commencement with his fellow steward, and to claim, in his official capacity, the hand of Lady Mary Sedley, Herbert availed himself of this arrangement to enter the circle, and go through his course of recognitions.

The result was not encouraging. Lord Rodborough was cold and distant; Lady Rodborough, though not uncivil, seemed less disposed to talk to him than she had been at her own ball; Lady Malvern, with whom he had become well acquainted at Huntley, now treated him as a comparative stranger. Sackville, though perfectly friendly in his manner, was too much engaged in talking to others to give him much of his attention. Mr. Morton appeared to be manœuvring to avoid him, and acknowledged him only with a grave bow; and Lacy had the

additional pain of observing that the countenance of Agnes, which had been in some degree animated till his approach, was then suddenly chilled into reserve.

Thus met, he soon withdrew in mortification and disgust. For the coldness of the Rodboroughs he cared little; but the estrangement of the Mortons gave him much concern, and he would gladly have pressed for an explanation of its cause, had not feelings, which can easily be imagined, always prevented him, whenever that wish arose. He tried to dismiss them from his thoughts, and resolved, in a moment of pique, not only to devote himself exclusively to others, but to let them see that it was not in the power of their caprice to check the flow of his gaiety. The principle of reaction is very visible in the operations of the mind; and, after the depression which Lacy had endured, when he came to assume a contrary tone, his excited spirits vented themselves in an excess of mirthfulness; and his air and conversation, which were usually animated, now

became lively in an increased degree. He felt no real exhilaration : it was but a feverish excitement, which, on subsiding, would again leave him in depression. Nor was it easy gaiety : it had in it a degree of recklessness, which, in a private circle, would have been soon observed ; but, in a crowded ball-room, these nice shades were less distinguishable, and it easily passed for the genuine effervescence of lightened spirits. Never had he been so lavish of attentions to Miss Hartley ; and instead of being indifferent and abstracted, as at the ball at Westcourt, he was now cheerful and attentive, and exerted himself for her entertainment.

Miss Hartley, who was really very pretty, and looked particularly well upon this occasion, seemed a very natural and deserving object of his homage ; and many were induced to believe that Herbert was paying serious court to her, especially as Lady Lacy, who was highly delighted with her son's conduct, though she indeed refrained from saying any thing, con-

trived to look a great deal. The consequence was, that the report of Herbert's attachment to Miss Hartley, which before had been gently whispered, now received strong confirmation, and began to be very confidently mentioned by the various retailers of gossip.

On the following morning, the second and last day of the races, Lacy looked in vain for Agnes at the stand; neither did he meet with Mr. Morton, nor did any circumstance occur which tended to produce a change in his feelings. Lord Malvern still preserved the same unsocial coldness, and Lacy felt too proud and indignant to endeavour to remove it.

At length the sports of the course were terminated, and the gentlemen repaired to the noisy discomfort of a race ordinary, to partake of a bad dinner, and worse wine; and to endure afterwards a weary hour of tumultuous absurdity, the little conversational merriment which any of them could enjoy, being repeatedly checked by a vehement thumping on the table,

the precursor of some hacknied toast, which had been handed down from race to race, and doomed, by prescriptive right, to be hailed with the idle clamour of three times three.

Mr. Morton was present at this dinner, and though he sat at no great distance from Lacy, on the other side of the table, abstained from all signs of recognition. Lacy, who was unwilling to think that he had given him any just cause of offence, and felt that perhaps his own manner might have conveyed a false impression of unfriendliness, determined not to omit any opportunity of arriving at a better understanding. The obvious attention of asking Mr. Morton to drink wine with him, he thought might possibly afford an opening for some resumption of civility. For some time he vainly endeavoured to catch his eye, or make him hear the invitation, and failing in this was obliged to have recourse to the surer method of sending round his message by a servant. To this message he received the singular answer that Mr. Morton

had lately drank wine with another person, and begged to be excused; and Lacy was left in little doubt as to the existence of actual ill-will.

The dinner was ended; the wine had circulated: the muster-roll of toasts had at length been expended; the members for the county, and the members for the borough; the gentlemen who had sent their horses, and the owners of those that had won; the present stewards, and the stewards elect, had severally received their compliment, and returned their thanks; the steward had left the chair; the company had risen, and some were departing, and some were assembling in little knots in various parts of the room. By degrees the party grew thinner and thinner, till few were left except the immediate friends of the two stewards. Lacy and Hartley went out to give some orders, and in a few minutes returned.

As they entered, Mr. Morton was standing with his back towards them, at a little distance from the door, engaged in conversation with

another gentleman, and Lacy could not avoid hearing distinctly a good deal of what they said. "Sneaking policy—dirty proceeding," were the first words which caught his ear. Then Mr. Morton's companion said something that was not audible, and Mr. Morton afterwards proceeded, in rather a loud and angry tone—

"One cannot call such a man a gentleman. I never knew a more paltry method of currying favour—think of a person in his situation concealing his knowledge of a defective title!—making a merit of resigning the first refusal of an estate which he had been privately informed was not saleable! Pitiful, truly pitiful!"

Here he was checked by his companion, whose face was turned towards Lacy; and who, seeing him, said to Mr. Morton, in a low tone, "The son will hear you."

"I don't care if he does," replied Morton, whose natural irritability seemed to have been rather inflamed by wine; "I am not ashamed

of what I am saying; and I will repeat, be he present or not, that Sir William Lacy was privately informed that the Bloxwich property was not saleable, before he made a merit of letting Lord Rodborough buy it."

Lacy heard every syllable of this charge, and so also did Hartley, who took him by the arm, and seemed desirous of leading him onward; but Lacy resisted, and evinced an intention of going towards Mr. Morton.

"Never mind him," whispered Hartley, fearful of some explosion.

"I must," replied Lacy; "he has made an assertion that must not pass uncontradicted."

"But he is half drunk, or he would not have said it."

"It matters not, he *has* said it; and, whatever may be his state now, he formed the opinion in sober earnest," and, so saying, he broke from the grasp of his brother-in-law, and walked straight towards Mr. Morton, who drew him-

self up, on seeing him approach, into an attitude of proud defiance.

“Mr. Morton,” said Lacy, in a steady tone, “I could not avoid overhearing your reflections on my father, and I think it right to tell you that you have been misinformed.”

“Misinformed, Sir!” repeated Mr. Morton, with a sneer. “You might have used a shorter word—you might have told me that I *lied*: that was your meaning, I suppose.”

“My meaning, Sir,” replied Lacy, “was to vindicate my father; and the words which I used, were such as I thought would be least offensive.”

“I am greatly beholden to you for your consideration; but you need not have beaten about the bush. I spoke plainly, and so might you. I hate all double dealing; and if you thought my assertion false, you might have told me so at once.”

“Then I will tell you,” replied Lacy, “I do think your assertion false. I have that confi-

dence in my father's honour, that I can never allow myself to believe that he has acted as you would insinuate."

"Insinuate, Sir! I assert it—but I won't stay to bandy explanations with a person that has given me the lie. After that there is only one fit answer; and that is, to call for satisfaction."

"I will talk to you no longer," replied Lacy, turning from him, "while you are in this intemperate state."

"Intemperate! Insolence! I think, Sir, you had already insulted me enough, without presuming to hint that I was drunk: but you shall hear more from me. This shall not end here."

"It is not my intention that it should," replied Lacy. "You have made assertions which I deny: the truth of that denial I will establish. The vindication of my father shall be complete; and for that end will we meet again." And so saying, Lacy turned round, and suddenly walked from him out of the room.

Hartley who had stood near, an astonished

witness of the past scene, quickly followed and soon came up to him, and they walked together towards their lodging, for some moments in silence.

Hartley^k was the first to speak.

“Well, Herbert,” said he, with a sigh, as if he had only then begun to breathe freely, “the gauntlet is thrown down, with a vengeance.”

Lacy made no answer.

“I am sorry for it,” pursued Hartley ; “these things are very unpleasant. How could he speak as he did of your father ! It was quite proper to contradict him ; but I am sorry the affair has turned out as it has. I don’t think he was quite himself. Perhaps it would have been better not to have spoken to him just then.”

“No, Hartley,” replied Lacy, “I cannot agree with you. Every minute that his assertion remained uncontradicted in my hearing, would have added fresh weight to the calumny. The denial of the charge must spring instantly from the genuine impulse of an honest convic-

tion, or it can be of no avail. A contrary line of conduct would have argued a degree of timid caution, which I should have considered a compromise of my father's character."

"Well, well, I believe you are right; but I still wish that every thing could have been explained without a quarrel."

He was going to have added more, when Lacy laid his hand upon his arm with an air of reproof, which silenced him.

"Hartley—spare me this," said he: "you cannot enter into all my feelings; you cannot know how much I have sacrificed to a sense of duty, and what it has cost me to engage in a quarrel with Mr. Morton."

No immediate reply was made; but, after a few minutes' silence, Hartley added, in a low tone, with a stronger pressure of his companion's arm—

"Forget my remarks, and forgive them. They were ill timed, to say the least of them. You have a friend in me that will stand by you,

happen what may—you understand me—you may want a second—though God forbid it should come to that.”

Lacy thanked him for the offer, and asked him to be the bearer of a letter; talked with him for a few minutes on the circumstances of the case; enjoined secrecy, that the quarrel might, if possible, be prevented from reaching the ears of his relations; and then desired to be left alone to the exercise of his own reflections.

And sad and troubled were those reflections; and dreadful was the view they opened. The parent of Agnes Morton was the public calumniator of his father! The former circumstance he must endeavour to forget; he must view him only in the latter capacity. And how to redress his father's wrongs?—this was the only question which a son should ask; and he did ask it to himself, in firmness and sincerity of spirit, and it directed him to a line of conduct which should uphold his father's cause without closing the door on reconciliation. He saw that something

decisive must instantly be done ; that the imputations had long been secretly laid, and had gained credit among their neighbours. Their recent coldness sufficiently proved it ; and as Sir William was unfortunately little known, and had engaged no favourable prepossessions to discredit the calumny, Herbert felt it the more incumbent on him to use vigorous measures to rescue his name from disgrace. The result of his deliberation was the following letter to Mr. Morton :—

“ SIR,

“ You have uttered, in my hearing, and in no measured terms, statements respecting the conduct of my father, which, as I solemnly believed them to be untrue, I could not, for an instant, suffer to pass uncontradicted. Your expressions, though intentionally hostile, I do not believe to have been intentionally false. I give you the fullest credit for a sincere faith in the truth of that which you alleged ; and can.

make great allowances for the irritation which such a conviction might naturally produce. But with whatever degree of confidence such allegations might be made, I feel myself equally bound to notice them, and to take the directest method of resisting your attacks.

“ With this view, I require from you a letter—to which I must be allowed to give all possible publicity—which shall express a sorrow for the intemperate nature of your language, and a willingness to suspend your unfavourable judgment, and also to co-operate with me in disproving the slander, and tracing it to its source. This is the least reparation which one gentleman can offer to the injured honour of another; and I ask it with a sincere confidence that it will not be refused. I can scarcely anticipate a refusal from one whose gentlemanly feelings I am willing to estimate highly; but I will not disguise from you the alternative which such a refusal must entail. Great as is my aversion to the system of duelling, and deeply as I should

regret the necessity of a hostile meeting with you, I should not regard the rescue of my father's character from unmerited obloquy too dearly purchased even at such a price.

“ I will not, however, dwell upon these possibilities of evil ; I will hope for a happier termination to our differences : and I shall hardly regret this temporary misunderstanding, if it shall be the means of bringing you to a truer estimation of the character of him whom you have been so hastily and unadvisedly led to calumniate.”

The letter was written, shown to Hartley, and approved of by him ; and within an hour from the time of Lacy's last angry parting from Mr. Morton, Hartley was on his way to deliver it to the latter.

CHAPTER XI.

The secret mischiefs that I set abroad,
I lay unto the grievous charge of others.

Richard III.

WE must now turn to Mr. Morton, who quitted the ordinary soon after Lacy, and retired to his apartment with feelings of no enviable description. Though somewhat heated with wine, and consequently in a state more than usually irritable, he could scarcely be said to have approached the verge of actual intoxication; and the passion of the moment was, therefore, soon permitted to subside into stubborn vexation, mixed with some portion of regret at the intemperate, or, what he feared might have seemed, ungentlemanly violence of his deport-

ment. He had always a great value for appearances, and he dreaded having departed, even in a quarrel, from the external requisites of good breeding. He had a great deal of pride; but it was the pride of a little mind. He was angry with himself for having compromised his dignity; but he was only the more angry with the cause and witness of his error; and the more determined to regain what he thought his fallen height, by a spirited resistance to all expostulation.

In this frame of mind, he was joined by Sackville, who, though not in the room at the ordinary at the time of the quarrel, had received some obscure intelligence of what had passed, and now came to learn from Mr. Morton the success of his own machinations. He had a difficult card to play: he had to repress inquiry into the origin of the disagreement, even while he pretended surprise and curiosity respecting its cause; and to inflame the anger of the contending parties while he ostensibly

laboured to act the peace maker. Scarcely had he heard from Mr. Morton the story of his wrongs, than it was announced that Mr. Hartley was desirous of seeing the latter.

“He brings an apology, I suppose,” said Sackville: “with your leave I will retire. You will doubtless think it more generous to receive the recantation alone.”

Sackville went out, promising a speedy return, and Hartley was ushered in.

“Mr. Morton,” said the latter, as he tendered a letter, “it is not my wish to press for a hasty answer to this letter; nor can I enter into any discussion of the circumstances which have produced it. I can only say that I regret them. You will reply at your leisure.”

Mutual bows passed, and Hartley departed, leaving Mr. Morton to the perusal of Lacy’s address. No sooner had he finished it, than Sackville returned, and the letter was put into his hands. His countenance, as he read it,

assumed an appearance of mingled astonishment and grief.

“I am sorry for this,” said he; “it is what I did not expect. It is a strange letter; half conciliatory, half—I was going to say, insulting; but I should be unwilling to think that he means to insult you. Do not let us give way to anger. Let us review his letter calmly.”

“I *am* calm,” said Mr. Morton, his features inflaming with anger as he spoke.

“If you were not,” replied Sackville, laying his hand soothingly upon his arm, “it would not much surprise me, considering, as I do, the provocation. I trust, however, that you can make considerable allowance for the indiscretion of a young man; though to be sure his youth ought to have made him more respectful; but young men will be hot and hasty. Yet, I dare say, he meant no great incivility—merely a contradiction.”

“Oh, no! merely a contradiction!” said Mr. Morton, with a splenetic smile.

“ And if his manner was not offensive——”

“ It *was* offensive,” interrupted Mr. Morton.

“ I am truly sorry to hear it,” pursued Sackville. “ He was probably very much irritated ; and it is perhaps the consciousness of *that* which makes him say, that he can make great allowances for the irritation which *you* might have felt.”

“ Insolence !” muttered Mr. Morton, stung to the quick by the artful mention of this galling passage. “ The supposition of my irritation, Mr. Sackville, was a license of his own ; and I can only regard it as an additional insult. Indeed the whole tenor of his letter is insulting. You know it is—and you cannot deny it.”

Sackville sighed, but attempted no denial. “ I wish to make the best of the case,” said he. “ I confess that Lacy and I are friends.—He owes me a service, and one is naturally partial to those whom one has befriended. In short, there is nobody with whom I more regret to see

you at variance, than with him. But do not, my dear Sir, therefore suppose that I am inclined to neglect your interests, or forget your prior claims to my consideration. If I appear to regard your wrongs as slight, it is because I am anxious to avoid the consequences of a meeting. You see the conditions of the letter—an apology for what he calls the intemperate nature of your language—or—Good God! that it should come to that! a duel. Oh! it must be prevented. I should be sorry that my anxiety for your safety should lead me to advise any humiliating step; but if it were possible by submission——”

“Submission! Mr. Sackville! do you know me so little as to expect——”

“Forgive me,” interrupted Sackville, rising in well feigned agitation. “I scarcely know what I am saying—perhaps I was too careless of your honour—I was thinking only of your safety. Lacy is young, and hot, and resolute. He is of an ancient and haughty family, and is

himself proud and high-spirited. He is little likely to yield, and I have always found him as good as his word."

"Oh, I will believe him as terrible as you please," replied Mr. Morton, with increasing anger. "You need not entertain me with a description of his qualifications for a duellist—spare me his feats with sword and pistol. You ought to know that considerations like these can make no difference in my resolution, and that I am not to be bullied with impunity, if he were fifty times the proud, resolute, high-spirited person, that you are pleased to represent him."

He paced angrily across the room, while Sackville regarded him with a calm look of secret satisfaction. By assuming an imprudent eagerness to compose the quarrel, he had contrived at once to save his own credit, and so to inflame the pride of his companion, as to render reconciliation more difficult than before. Nothing was now wanting to the consummation of his projects but a duel between Mr. Morton and

Lacy, by which Sackville hoped to effect the perpetual estrangement of the two families.

“ I have been considering,” said he, after a silence of a few minutes, “ whether it is not possible to arrange this unfortunate affair so as to avoid a meeting, consistently with a regard for your honour, which, however anxious for your safety, I would be the last to compromise.”

“ And what do you suggest ?” said Mr. Morton.

“ Would to God I knew how to answer you. You will not apologize—you must not fight him.—Why return him any answer ? Surely he will not dare to post you ?”

“ And can any friend of mine advise me to incur the possibility of such a disgrace ?”

“ No, no !” exclaimed Sackville, hastily, and as if much agitated and perplexed. “ I do not advise it ; I do not know what to advise. This circumstance agitates and distresses me. I have only one feeling—for your safety—one wish—

to prevent all evil consequences; but I am not capable of offering advice," and he turned away with well affected imbecility and dejection, leaving Mr. Morton to the uncontrolled guidance of those angry passions, which the insidious interposition of his false friend had goaded almost to frenzy.

Stung with a bitter sense of his wrongs, the latter, after one more angry glance at the least pacific parts of Lacy's letter, hastily took up pen and paper, and wrote the following answer.

"I accept your alternative. I do not shrink from the publicity with which you threaten me; but I will at least take care that you shall not publish a submission. I will not disappoint your evident wish for a hostile meeting. You will find me ready at six to-morrow. I claim the privilege of the challenged, in choosing time, weapons, and place of encounter. My weapons will be pistols. My second will arrange the rest."

The letter was written, and directed, before

Sackville would choose to exhibit any consciousness of the proceedings of Mr. Morton, and he started, as if from a dream, when the latter approached him with the letter in his hand.

“ Here is my answer,” said he. “ May I ask you to deliver it ?”

“ With pleasure,” replied Sackville, “ if its contents are pacific.”

“ Do I understand you correctly ?” exclaimed Morton. “ Is your consent to bear my letter only conditional ?”

“ It is only conditional,” replied Sackville. “ I can be the bearer of no hostile answer ; but do not, because I decline this office, doubt my friendship and willingness to assist you. The service which I once rendered to Lacy would make any such intervention extremely painful to me ; and I trust that your kindness will spare me the trial. If I were the only person who could perform this office, the case would be different, and I would willingly make the sacrifice ; but I am neither the only person, nor the most

proper one. You have a son-in-law, who has a prior claim, to have his services required. Lord Malvern, I am sure, will feel your wrongs as deeply as I can do, and he is more nearly connected with the cause of your misunderstanding. The quarrel, (if I may be allowed to say so,) is partly his, and he might feel hurt at not being applied to."

These arguments were sufficient; Mr. Morton, proud of his connection with the Rodboroughs, was glad to gain their co-operation in a quarrel, which, if the merits of the case were examined, really belonged much more to them, than to himself. Permission was therefore given to Sackville, to request that Lord Malvern would be the ostensible intervening party between the challenger and the challenged; and so ingeniously was the case represented by Sackville, that Lord Malvern, full of indignation at the wrongs of his father-in-law, fully acceded to every hostile measure in which he was required to co-operate.

About two hours had now elapsed since the meeting at the ordinary. Lord Malvern had presented himself to Lacy, as the friend and second of Mr. Morton ; had given his letter, and had retired to adjust with Hartley the preliminaries of the meeting ; when Sackville having ascertained to what stage the business had advanced, at length repaired, with the studied appearance of haste and consternation, to the presence of Lacy, with the ostensible purpose of protesting against those extremities, which he trusted it was now too late to prevent.

After many exclamations of sorrow and surprise, “ Lacy,” said he, with a well-assumed look of deep affliction, “ it is a cruel circumstance for me that such a misunderstanding should have occurred between my two best friends, and that I should not have been able to make up the quarrel : but I hope it may still be possible. I know that you are not implacable, nor, I trust, is Morton. I am willing to think

that he may be brought to listen to overtures. Perhaps some slight acknowledgment——”

“ Acknowledgment ! Of what ? ” said Lacy ; “ of the justice and generosity of his false attack upon my father’s character ? Of his public calumny of an absent person ? Consider, Sackville, what you are proposing ; and do not, in your eagerness for a reconciliation, so completely overlook the obstacles which lie in the way to it. You say you are willing to believe that Mr. Morton may be brought to listen to overtures : perhaps he may, but we have yet to learn, by whom those overtures can be made. I have shown a willingness to excuse his fault—and here,” pointing to Morton’s letter, “ is the reward of my forbearance.”

Sackville sighed, and looked imploringly at Lacy. “ Forgive me,” said he, “ if I seem officious—I wished, if possible, to be the bearer of some message which might lead to an amicable arrangement.”

“ Have you any authority from Mr. Morton,

to say that such a message would be favourably received ?”

Sackville hesitated, and seemed anxious to avoid the question ; and on Lacy’s repeating it, answered, despondingly, in the negative.

“ Then, where is your basis for an amicable arrangement ?”

Sackville made no answer ; and turned away with an audible sigh, which was meant to convey that there was none. It did convey that impression most strongly to the mind of Lacy : and thus had Sackville, under the guise of a peace-maker, artfully contrived to incense both parties still more against each other, and to lead them to the belief that no further step remained for either than to fight. He had effected this without committing himself by any assertion that could be repeated to the detriment of his plans ; and he had paralyzed and precluded the efforts of the seconds, by giving them to understand that the office of peace-maker was peculiarly his ; and that his exertions, though aided

by the advantage of a friendship with both of the parties, were entirely unsuccessful.

Thus deprived of the sincere good offices of their true friends, and exposed to the deep-laid treachery of a false one, the hostile parties advanced without one efficient check towards that unhallowed system, that remnant of barbarous contention, which the rules of modern society still prescribe as the best mode of appeasing the wounded feelings, and re-establishing the injured character, of its most elevated members.

CHAPTER XII.

Le duel est le triomphe de la mode, et l'endroit où elle a exercé son empire avec plus d'éclat.

BRUYERE.

THOUGH it was known to several that angry words had passed between Mr. Morton and Herbert Lacy, yet the knowledge of the subsequent challenge, and its acceptance, was confined to five persons—the principals, seconds, and Sackville. The Rodboroughs, Lady Malvern, and Agnes, had returned from the course to Westcourt and Dodswell, and could not be apprised of the circumstance. There was more danger of discovery on the part of Herbert's relations; for Lady Lacy and his sister were still staying in the town, and he and Hartley

could not avoid seeing them that night. Hartley, though with a heavy heart, prudently resolved to absent himself, by fulfilling his duties at the ball, a woeful epilogue to that of the preceding evening. Herbert was perfectly successful in assuming the appearance of cheerfulness and composure; and quietly pleading an engagement on the morrow, as the cause of his return to Lacy Park, he mounted his horse and rode home. He found Sir William still up, engaged with a book that interested him, and little disposed to talk. He merely observed to his son that his coming was unexpected; made no inquiry about the races, concerning which, he rather piqued himself upon showing no curiosity—and continued to read in silence.

“And this,” thought Herbert, as he sat near his father, shading with his hand his agitated countenance, “and this, perhaps, is our last interview, and it must pass in indifference and silence; and I must utter nothing of all that I would say, nay, must talk with an air of care-

lessness, and take, perhaps, an eternal leave, as if we should meet on the morrow."

His agitation was very great, and if Sir William had not been much absorbed, he must have observed it.

"I must command myself," thought Lacy, "and break through this horrible silence."
"Have you heard, Sir?" said he, "that——"

"My dear Herbert, I have heard nothing," interrupted the baronet, rather drily: "what should I hear in this cell of mine? Hermits have little to do with news: but come," he added, closing his book, "I will hear you talk for five minutes. What was your piece of information?"

"That Lord Rodborough has purchased the Bloxwich property."

"I know that," replied Sir William.

"And that the title is defective."

"I know that too."

Herbert felt a sudden chill of ominous dread at these words; and confident as he had been of

the integrity of his father, it was with trembling eagerness that he inquired how long he had possessed this knowledge—the answer re-assured him.

“A day or two,” was the reply; and Herbert breathed more freely.

“And you never knew it before?” he added.

“Certainly, never—how should I?”

“I do not know—perhaps Allen——”

“Allen? he tell me? no, not he: besides, consider, my dear fellow, that, if I had really known the circumstance, though I should have acted prudently in refusing the purchase, I could not, with propriety, have appeared to waive it in favour of another—that would have been dishonest—a piece of practical equivocation—I hope you view it in that light.”

“Exactly, Sir, I perfectly agree with you.”

Sir William then rose to retire, and Herbert felt with anguish that the terrible moment of parting had arrived. The baronet stopped to

contemplate for an instant the haggard countenance of his son.

“Herbert,” said he, “you look ill. You have been jaded and harassed with these races. You are a sight to moralize upon—a standing warning to all who make a toil of pleasure. But I cannot stay to moralize. You want rest, and so do I. Good night! Why, how now? have you any thing to say to me?”

“No, Sir—nothing.”

“Why then, good night? Nay, surely you do not take me for your partner? that squeeze of the hand must have been meant for her. Is it some new divinity? or the old one re-installed? Well, well, make your disclosures at your own good time, only do not let it be now. Come, what are we lingering about? once more—good night.”

“Good night!” repeated Herbert, almost inaudibly, and fixed to the spot, and scarcely breathing, followed his father with his eyes till the closing door concealed him.

“Gone!” he murmured to himself, “and I may never see him more; and this perhaps was an eternal leave-taking!” He threw himself on a chair, and hid his face in his hands, in a short paroxysm of mental agony.

After a while he arose, and with a countenance calmer than before, “The struggle is past,” said he: “now to my duty.” The task he had enjoined himself, and which he now prepared to execute, was a severe one, and demanded all his firmness. It was to inform his father, by letter, of all that had passed, and that still was to ensue, and the motives which influenced his conduct. This latter part of his address is the only one which it is necessary to transcribe.

“I do not know,” he said, “how far my violent mode of vindication may meet with your deliberate approval. I might perhaps at the time be acting more under the influence of mere feeling than I was willing to believe; but still, when I calmly review my conduct, I am not disposed to condemn it.

“ Do not, however, suppose that I am therefore an advocate for duelling. I think that the instances are very few in which it is justifiable. I question whether I would ever call it more than a venial offence; but I consider that the degrees of criminality vary greatly, and that every case must be judged upon its own merits. I acknowledge, with respect, the authority of the law as a vindicator of wrongs; but these are wrongs which the law cannot vindicate—and wounds which it cannot heal; and the customs of society have recognized this system as the only remedy in such cases. A more perfect state of society would probably have dispensed with such an ordeal: but we cannot change the constitution of the world, and must avail ourselves of such measures as are suited to the exigencies of the time.

“ In the present instance, an amicable inquiry might doubtless satisfactorily confute the calumny; but if the accuser persist in his hostility, and if I cannot call the attention of

the public to a quiet examination of the case, I can at least show them the firmness of my own convictions. This practical appeal may have its effect upon minds that have not sufficient candour to be accessible to any other. I am now aware that the poison has long been secretly working when we were unconscious of it, and that some decided measure is necessary to check its progress. I am diffident of my own judgment, and of the solidity of these reasons: but I have another, which, bound as I feel to open to you my whole heart, I will not scruple to reveal.

“ It was impossible,—it would have been wrong, that you should not have been acquainted with the injurious reflections which had been cast upon your character. You must have known them in course of time, and knowing them, it is not improbable that you might have challenged your aggressor. This I could prevent only by forestalling your intentions, and rendering myself a hostage, and I am thankful to Providence

for the chance which has enabled me to do so. I trust I shall meet my opponent without bearing with me any evil passion. I view him as a misguided person, and much as he has injured you, I feel rather grief than anger at his delusion. I wish him no injury, and shall endeavour not to wound him."

After having performed this task, his mind seemed unburthened of a load, and invigorated by the trial he had undergone. As the flow of his spirits abated, a sense of bodily fatigue came over him; and having offered his accustomed prayer at the throne of Mercy, with more than usual fervour and solemnity, he threw himself upon a bed to snatch a short repose. Roused by no accusing conscience he soon yielded to the hand of nature, and sleep surprised him pondering on the phenomenon of his own tranquillity.

When he awoke, it was yet night, but a dim, grey light, the precursor of morning, was faintly appearing in the east. No living creature had

yet given signs of life ; nothing met his eye but the distant gleam, a solemn monitor of the lapse of time, and all between was dark and dubious as his own fate. He arose and looked out, and fixed his eyes intently on the brightening horizon.

“ Soon,” thought he, “ all this scene will teem with light and life as usual—while I—I may never see it more ; but, living or dead, I shall have performed a painful duty.”

With gentle steps he quitted his apartment, and sought the room where his father usually sat. He deposited his letter on the table ; looked round at many well known objects, now faintly visible through the gloom, and then silently retired. In a few minutes he had quitted the house, mounted his horse, which he had privately ordered to be ready for him, and was on his road to Henbury. He dismounted at an inn near the outskirts of the town, and walked to the place where Hartley had appointed to meet him. As he approached the spot, he

heard footsteps behind him, and on turning, saw his brother-in-law. Their only greeting was a silent pressure of the hand, and for a while no word was uttered. The object of their meeting was a topic which they approached with repugnance; and every other seemed irrelevant.

“We are before our time,” was Hartley’s first observation.

“We are, and it is best.”

“Is your father informed?”

“No: happily he knows nothing. My mother and Emily——?”

“They have no suspicions.”

“Thank God! Charles, if I fall, convey to them every assurance of my sincere affection; say, that my last, best wishes were for their happiness—say to them—but I cannot express what I would—it is difficult to clothe in words all that one feels at such a moment as this—but you know my sentiments, and can supply what is wanting.”

Hartley pressed his hand—but tears filled his eyes, and for a while he could not speak. “God forbid,” said he at length, “that such a necessity should ever come. Do not think so gloomily of the case—why look on the dark side? It is exposing yourself to a needless trial.”

“Nay, not needless,” replied Lacy. “I would have no calamity come upon me unawares. There is neither sense nor courage in shutting one’s eyes to possible evils; and I trust I can look steadily at the worst—and now let us go to the ground.”

A few minutes’ walk brought them to the appointed place of meeting, a retired field, selected on account of its remoteness from both house and road. It was a grey, chill, autumnal morning—the sun had just risen, and was dimly appearing like a red globe through the dense mass of vapours which then lay heavy on the horizon. No breeze ruffled the trees—scarce a leaf stirred—not an insect was on the wing; and silence seemed to reign over the land, invaded only by

the solemn measured croakings of the unseen raven. The cattle lay quiescent, their heads barely emerging above a white veil of mist, which was spread over the surface of the earth, giving to the neighbouring fields the character of lakes, and making the low hedges rise around them with all the dignity of forests. It was nature under its most placid, and, at the same time, least cheering aspect.

Scarcely had Lacy and his companion entered and surveyed the scene, than two figures appeared to advance through the mist, from the opposite corner of the field. These were, Lord Malvern and Mr. Morton. The latter presently stopped: Lacy also fell back; and the two seconds advanced to make the preliminary arrangements. Many words had not passed between them, before another person was seen to approach, and they found themselves joined by Sackville. Hartley received him with an air of coldness and surprise.

“ You come, I conclude, as the friend of

Mr. Morton," said he. "He probably remembers the proverb, 'in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.'"

"I trust that such will be the case," replied Sackville, calmly, "and not to him only. I come as the friend of both parties—I will not give up the last chance of reconciliation."

The seconds shook their heads. "If reconciliation had been possible," observed Lord Malvern, "we should not have met here," and without more words, they proceeded to make the preparations for the combat.

The ground was measured, the pistols loaded, the signal settled, and the parties had taken their respective stations. Sackville had once more demanded, in terms which he knew would be repugnant to the feelings of each, whether either party was willing to prevent the possible effusion of blood, by making any timely concessions. A stern denial was their mutual answer. The seconds exchanged a sorrowing

look—the signal was given—and Morton and Lacy fired at the same instant.

Neither took any aim, or even looked at his opponent. Their eyes were fixed upon their seconds in expectation of the signal, and their pistols lowered, until it was given. Lacy's pistol, though his arm was straight, was directed upwards at the time he fired, by a slight elevation of the wrist, a circumstance, which however material, escaped the observation of the seconds. The smoke, added to the mistiness of the atmosphere, rendered it difficult, at the first instant, to perceive the effect of the fire. It was, however, immediately ascertained, that each combatant still stood erect in his place; and an exclamation of thankfulness burst involuntarily from the bystanders.

Lord Malvern, Hartley, and Sackville, then advanced, and the latter inquired aloud if both parties were satisfied. Mr. Morton made no answer. Lacy stood immoveable, with arms folded across his breast. His mien was humble,

rather than haughty: his countenance was very pale, and its expression was rather that of calm resignation, than the indignant stubbornness of a combatant.

“I came here,” said he, in a low, but resolute tone, “to vindicate my father, and I repeat my first demands. I ask of Mr. Morton, that he shall publicly express a sorrow for his accusations, and a willingness to suspend his judgment; and that he shall consent to co-operate with me, in tracing, and disproving the slander which he allowed himself to utter. This is still my demand. Mr. Morton hears it: let him answer.”

Mr. Morton's irritation had been gradually cooling since the period of the challenge, and he was now on the point of returning a conciliatory answer; when a look from Sackville, a look addressed to him alone, and bearing in it scorn and wonder, rekindled in an instant all the angry pride which had burned so fiercely the preceding night. An instantaneous change of

sentiments ensued; he scowled defiance upon Lacy, and sternly rejected his conditions. The seconds wished to compose the difference; but each feared to compromise the honour of his friend, and each consequently scrupled to speak. There was no alternative but to fire again. Another pistol was put into the hand of each of the opponents; and the seconds drew back, and again prepared to give the signal.

At this instant, Lacy was seen to advance towards Mr. Morton, but with uncertain steps, and a bewildered air, as if not conscious what he did. Mr. Morton started, and uttered an exclamation: and the sudden and strange demeanour of both the combatants, was regarded with surprise by the seconds.

“Keep your ground,” cried Lord Malvern.

“He is pale—he staggers!” said Sackville.

“Blood! I see blood!” exclaimed Hartley, “he is wounded—save him! save him!” and springing forward, he caught Lacy in his arms as he was sinking senseless to the ground. He

had been wounded by the first fire, and had concealed the circumstance that he might better effect that vindication to which he had devoted himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

Le commun des hommes va de la colere, a l'injure : quelques uns en usent autrement ; ils offensent, et puis se fachent.

BRUYERE.

It would be difficult adequately to describe the effect of this unexpected and terrible discovery. All was grief and consternation. The angry pride of Mr. Morton was suddenly transformed into repentant sorrow ; and with a quick revulsion of feeling, he bitterly bewailed aloud the unhappy chance which had rendered him the victor.

“ Oh that I had fallen !” he exclaimed, in a tone of agony, as he knelt by Lacy, anxiously assisting to restore his wandering senses. Sackville pressed him to depart, and consider his

own safety ; but he was deaf to all such entreaties.

“ I will not stir until he revives,” said he. “ Let me at least know that I am not quite a murderer.”

“ Thank God ! he does revive,” said Hartley.

“ He does ! he does ! God be thanked !” exclaimed Mr. Morton. “ Mr. Lacy, I was hasty—I was wrong—I yield to your conditions.”

“ Do not linger—save yourself,” said Sackville, seizing him by the arm.

“ Away !” said Mr. Morton, “ and let me make my atonement. Mr. Lacy, I abjure my suspicions of your father—I accede to all you asked.”

Lacy’s consciousness had returned, and though a partial oblivion of the past attended his first recovery, he was sufficiently himself again to be aware of the important purport of Mr. Morton’s words. He faintly signified his acceptance of the concession, and stretched out his hand in

pledge of reconciliation. The pledge was promptly received ; and the hands, that a few minutes ago had been armed for mutual destruction, were now joined in earnest of returning friendship.

Strange is the sudden revulsion of feeling, which powerful circumstances produce. Such happy results form one of the strongest among the practical arguments that are adduced in favour of the otherwise scarcely defensible system of duelling ; and in opposition to such as object that the influence of these emotions is too sudden and violent to be lasting, it may be said, that the instances are not unfrequent, of those who have met in this hostile manner having lived long afterwards on terms of friendship.

The attentions of the whole party to Lacy were unremitted. A surgeon who, under pledge of secrecy, had been engaged by the seconds to be in readiness, and who had remained apart at a little distance, to wait the issue of the fire,

now approached to afford his assistance and advice. The wound was happily discovered not to be dangerous, and Lacy's temporary insensibility, which had struck the party with such alarm, was pronounced to have proceeded only from the effusion of blood. His safe removal was now the object uppermost in their minds, and a carriage having been providently ordered beforehand to be stationed at a convenient distance from the place of meeting, Lacy was soon placed in it, to be conveyed to his brother-in-law's apartments in the town.

Though too weak to combat any of the arrangements that were made respecting his disposal, Lacy was anxious to avoid all chance of sudden alarm to his mother and sister, and proposed to be conveyed elsewhere; but Hartley, influenced by the idea that his brother-in-law would be better there than any where else, overruled his objections, saying that they must know some time or other, and might as well be informed at first. The carriage conveying Lacy

moved at a foot's pace towards the town, and considerable time elapsed before it arrived at the house.

Hartley, who had walked thither, arrived a few minutes before it, and was engaged in communicating the intelligence to Lady Lacy and Mrs. Hartley, when Herbert entered the house, assisted by Sackville and the surgeon. Not knowing where to conduct their charge, they opened the door of the nearest room, which happened to be the breakfast room, where Miss Hartley was sitting alone. She rose hastily, with some surprise at the unexpected intrusion ; a surprise which soon grew into alarm as she cast her eyes upon the figure of Lacy, to whom, she saw at once, that something serious had happened.

Lacy wished to retire, but Sackville would not allow him ; and directing the surgeon to lead him to the sofa, he advanced towards Miss Hartley, and in a few words explained the whole circumstance, of which, not having yet

seen her brother, she was totally ignorant. Naturally timid, and endued with little strength of mind, hearing suddenly of the actual occurrence of horrors which she had hitherto thought almost fictitious, and which her imagination instantly magnified, and seeing in the pale countenance of Lacy enough to warrant her worst fears, she found the shock too great for her feeble nerves ; and scarcely had Sackville uttered ten words, than she turned pale and fainted—Sackville caught her as she was about to fall, and Lacy himself, forgetting his wound, rushed forward to her assistance.

Lady Lacy, her daughter, and Hartley, entered the room immediately afterwards ; and instead of finding a sympathizing group round the wounded Lacy, saw a new and unexpected sufferer in Miss Hartley : and all the interest and compassion which was due to Herbert, suddenly transferred to her. The perplexity which it produced, was, perhaps, to them a fortunate circumstance, and spared them from much need-

less anxiety ; for they could not, on seeing Lacy interested in the temporary sufferings of another, and seemingly regardless of his own situation, any longer entertain those extreme apprehensions which their imaginations, in the first instance, had been rather prone to magnify. They expected to have found Herbert almost senseless, and scarcely able to speak or move ; and their first emotion, on now beholding him so engaged, was one of joyful surprise : but grief quickly followed ; and greatly as their first fears had exceeded the truth, they still found in his actual state, much cause for lamentation.

Sir William Lacy soon arrived : his coming had been somewhat retarded by an interview with Mr. Morton, in the presence of Lord Malvern. Immediately upon Herbert's being taken from the ground, under the care of Hartley and Sackville, Mr. Morton formed the sudden resolution of going to Lacy Park, to inform the baronet of his son's state, and to offer, in person, his recantation. It was a resolution formed be-

fore the tide of generous sorrow, and self-condemnation had begun to revert, and when atonement was felt to be, not only a duty, but a pleasure.

On his arrival, he found Sir William Lacy in much agitation. He had read his son's letter, and was on the point of setting out for Henbury. The interview was short, but satisfactory; and, as it took place in the presence of Lord Malvern, it was effectual in removing those aspersions which had been hastily cast upon Sir William's conduct. Thus, scarcely had the baronet become informed of the attack which had been made upon him, than he received an atonement for the injury, and shook hands with the person whom, a few minutes before, he had considered as his mortal enemy.

The meeting between Sir William and Herbert was marked by much emotion on either side. Joy, at finding his son out of danger, and parental pride and gratitude for his noble defence of his reputation; the excitement, too

occasioned by his interview with Mr. Morton, and the effects of the agitation he had undergone upon reading Herbert's letter, all now combined to overcome his firmness: he struggled, but in vain, to prevent the burst of overcharged feelings; till, at length, bending his head upon the shoulder of Herbert, he wept audibly.

After some time had passed, and their feelings had subsided into comparative calmness, Sir William, having expressed his warmest thanks to his son, for the promptness and self-devotion with which he had undertaken his defence, added, " Herbert, after what I have said, you will not, I hope, accuse me of coldness and ingratitude; and I may venture, without hurting you, to take another view of what has passed. Let us, in all circumstances, whether of great or little moment, proportion our means to the end we wish to gain. Do not let us incur sacrifices for which the object, when gained, will be no sufficient compensation. To rebut a slander is certainly desirable, but there are many ways of

effecting it. The one which you chose, my dear son, was of very doubtful issue, and involved the liability of a sacrifice, for which no success could have compensated. I am glad to find my character vindicated; but I cannot look back without a shudder at the peril through which that purpose was effected. Consider how much dearer, how much more valuable, you are, and ought to be to me, than mere popular estimation. Your loss could not have been repaid, even if the public had decreed me a statue of gold. But you acted to save my honour, and our honour, we are told, should be dearer than our life."

"And should it not?"

"Perhaps it should; but think first what you mean by your honour, and do not let us confound the shadow with the substance. Is there no difference between committing a dishonourable action, and being unjustly charged with one? Is there any moral guilt in being slandered?—Is there any moral obligation to clear

one's-self at all hazards? 'There are too many, Herbert, who lose sight of these distinctions—who live only on public opinion, and are so accustomed to estimate their own conduct by its effect upon others, that they can scarcely imagine any difference between being honourable, and being thought so. I do not mean to say that the desire of approbation is not an estimable, or, I would rather say, an useful feeling; if not quite a virtue, it is the guarantee of many, and society owes much that is valuable to its existence; but it is a sentiment to which, perhaps, in consideration of its great results, we are apt to attach rather an undue importance. I do not wish entirely to convert you, Herbert; I do not wish to make you quite as regardless of the opinion of the world as I am myself, for, perhaps, I have fallen into the opposite extreme. I was always rather careless of what others thought and said of me, and it is a fault which increases with age. At your time of life, to be solicitous, even to excess, of the approbation of others, is

the better excess of the two. Do not think that I disapprove of this sentiment—in you I know it is the parent of much that is generous and noble; but there is no subject upon which more romantic and specious declamation has been uttered, and of a kind very captivating to young imaginations; and it can do you no harm to hear this opposed by a few plain opinions, from one, whose enthusiasm has been cooled by sixty winters.”

Mr. Morton's full recantation, together with the representations of Sackville, who wished to stifle all inquiry, prevented Sir William Lacy from examining very narrowly into the origin of the mistake from which the injurious charge had arisen. Sackville, who possessed, to admiration, the art of leading others into an opinion, without seeming directly to advise them, instilled into the minds of both parties a feeling that it was more generous and decorous to apologize, and forgive and forget, than to enter into a scrupulous investigation of the facts which had

led either of them into error. In the slight inquiry which did take place, the weight of the blame was made to rest upon Allen; but so dexterous an obscurity and confusion was thrown over the whole case, that the parties were soon glad to take refuge in a general assumption of the thing to be proved, from the tedious intricacies of its development.

Let us turn for a moment to Agnes Morton, than whom none can be supposed to have felt a more intense interest in the singular transactions of these two days. Her situation would have been agonizing indeed, had she been all along conscious of that which was to happen; but she had remained in fortunate ignorance—not, indeed, of the violence of her father's ill-will towards the Lacys, but of the latter excesses into which it had led him. The knowledge of this part of the history came upon her after the termination of the duel; but it was so carefully broken to her, and all the more gratifying circumstances of the reconciliation, and of

Lacy's state of safety, were so judiciously brought foremost to her knowledge, that the grief and anxiety which she otherwise would have felt, were in a great measure removed. She could no longer wish for the society of Lacy; indeed it was a trial from which she rather desired to be exempt; yet still it was a satisfaction to her to find that no enmity separated the families.

What she found most painful was the necessity of disguising the interest she took in the progress of Lacy's recovery, particularly when in the presence of Sackville, who was the usual channel of information respecting him. Strong as was her resolution to forswear her unfortunate attachment, and think only on her present engagement, she almost wished, at times, that this resolution would be confirmed in her by an engagement on the part of Lacy; and that she might be encouraged, even by his example, to forget what had once been their mutual feelings. This melancholy wish, had soon a prospect of being accomplished to it fullest extent.

CHAPTER XIV.

It many times falls out that we deem ourselves much deceived in others, because we first deceived ourselves.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THAT good often springs out of evil has, from time immemorial, been the just observation of many philosophers; and Lady Lacy, though very widely removed from a philosopher, was disposed to be of the same opinion, when she saw that the unfortunate circumstance of her son's wound had the happy effect of furthering the desired union between him and Charlotte Hartley. It had been settled by her, at the time of Herbert's removal to Lacy Park, that as he was fond of society, and could not now stir from home to obtain it, it would be more

agrecable for him if their family party were a little augmented. Emily and her husband were therefore desired to come and stay at Lacy; and as their sister was then with them, what so natural as that she should be invited too? Lady Lacy did not scruple to impart to Mrs. Hartley her wish that Charlotte and Herbert should be thrown a little together; and that lady, who was cautious of offering any opposition on this point, or of questioning the desirableness of the object, gave her entire concurrence.

Having gained this point, Lady Lacy confidently anticipated the success that was to follow, and complacently reviewed all the favourable circumstances that were infallibly to lead to it. Herbert would not be able to stir much from the house, or absent himself from Miss Hartley's society. His situation too was a very interesting one; and if Charlotte had a grain of proper sensibility, how could she fail to fall in love with him? Of course she must—and, assuming this to be the case, if Herbert had a

grain of gratitude, how could he fail to be equally enamoured in his turn?

This reasoning seemed very satisfactory; but Lady Lacy had, for the support of her conclusions, something more than probabilities. She could also build upon the occurrence of favourable circumstances which had already fallen under her own observation. Of these, foremost in importance was the fact of Miss Hartley's fainting, when she first came to the knowledge of Herbert's disaster. This, to Lady Lacy, seemed conclusive—an unequivocal proof of ardent attachment. To all attempts to attribute it to sudden fright, she was perfectly inaccessible. She knew it was something more, and could soon remember a great many instances in which Miss Hartley had been suddenly frightened, and had not fainted. She had been alone in a room with a mouse, and in a summer-house with two toads. She had been overturned in a pony-carriage, and once very nearly thrown from her horse—and in none of those instances

had she fainted ;—therefore, fright alone could not make her faint. And then followed the important corollary, that nothing but all-powerful love could cause so violent an emotion.

Herbert thought otherwise—perhaps, in a great measure, because he hoped so. He had every wish to retard the discovery of Miss Hartley's attachment to him ; and the consciousness of this wish made him sometimes fear that he was guilty of perverse blindness in giving so little importance to those indications which had struck others so forcibly. It was not merely the opinion of Lady Lacy—his sister was also of the same way of thinking. Hartley, though he alluded to it very slightly, always seemed to treat it as a matter of course ; and there was something in the manner, and, occasionally, in the words of Sackville, who was now a frequent visitor, which showed that he also entertained a similar belief.

Nor was this the only force that arrayed itself against his solitary hopes and opinions.

Mrs. Poole, who came to spend a few days at Lacy Park, also contributed her mite of intelligent looks and ambiguous speeches; and though last, not least in the lists was Luscombe. This gentleman, ever since the duel, had taken a great interest in the situation of Lacy, had called repeatedly to inquire after him, and had shown such an earnest desire to make himself useful and agreeable, that Lacy, though he had not previously liked the man, whom he regarded as a mere parasite, could not help being won by his attentions.

These attentions soon produced, what Luscombe doubtless expected, an invitation to stay at Lacy Park. The invitation was accepted; and as its term was undefined, Sir William and his lady were favoured with his company for a much longer time than they had originally contemplated. He, however, made himself a pleasant inmate; for, being accustomed to spend at least nine-tenths of his time in other people's houses, he had become habitually dexterous in

the act of paying for his reception in the small coin of little attentions ; and that person must have been very impracticable, with whom, he could not have discovered some mode of ingratiating himself.

Luscombe afforded Herbert a further confirmation of the truth of that which he had gathered from the hints and looks of the rest of the party. It was insinuated to him in all tones, the bantering, the serious, the lively, and the confidential ; and as Luscombe appeared to Herbert to have taken a very just estimate of the qualities and capacity of Miss Hartley, whom he evidently did not admire, there arose a presumption that his observation might have been equally accurate upon this other point. Lacy, however, was quite satisfied with his confirmation of the unwelcome truth, without his endeavouring to promote it, which it seemed that, out of his great friendship, he was rather disposed to do.

On entering the drawing-room one day, Her-

bert found Luscombe and Miss Hartley *tête-à-tête*, standing together near the fire, and apparently earnestly engaged in conversation. As he entered the dialogue suddenly ceased. Miss Hartley turned away her head, blushed, seemed hurried, and soon left the room. Luscombe also coloured slightly, and appeared for a moment ill at ease; but his usual smiling composure soon returned, and was perfectly re-established by the time that Miss Hartley had departed.

“We were talking about you,” said he to Lacy, with a good-humoured look of significance. “I was saying I thought you looked much better, and she said indeed she thought you did. She seemed very anxious about you: she asked me how long people generally were in recovering from a wound with a bullet, and I told her that it depended entirely upon the nature of the wound, and a variety of circumstances.”

“In short, you proved her question to be a

silly one, and she was blushing at your reproof."

"No, it was not exactly so. Just when you came in I was joking with her about a picture. We had found a head that she admired, and she pretended not to see that there was any likeness in it to you, and so I was saying—"

"My dear fellow," said Herbert, somewhat vexed, yet hardly knowing how to be angry, "pray don't treat me with the whole detail. It was perhaps more than enough to have entertained Miss Hartley with such a subject; I am sure you can find much better ones for your *tête-à-têtes* than me."

Luscombe looked distressed at the observation.

"I did not mean to hurt you," pursued Lacy. "I know what you did was well intended;" and here the conversation ceased.

Lacy was not disposed to be credulous, and he would probably have withstood all this array of looks, hints, and surmises, if he had not been

still further urged onward to belief by the behaviour of Miss Hartley herself. There was an evident change in her manner : she used to be lively and thoughtless ; she was now much graver in her general demeanour, and not unfrequently pensive, and abstracted. Towards him she no longer showed that almost sisterly frankness and familiarity which their long acquaintance had rendered natural. There was an additional shade of reserve, and occasionally a slight appearance of conscious flutter and agitation, for which he knew not how to account by any other supposition than the one he dreaded. He had seen her blush when he approached, and withdraw her eyes when met by his ; yet his society was by no means avoided ; it rather seemed to be sought, as if more agreeable to her than ever. Her conscious timidity of manner seemed to increase, at the same time that she was lingering in his presence, and daily affording him additional opportunities for a *tête-à-tête*.

On these occasions Lacy sometimes observed that she was considerably abstracted, and much less attentive to what he said, than to something which she seemed desirous of saying herself.

One day, when they were alone, Lacy was particularly struck by these peculiarities in her manner, and by an increased appearance of anxious abstraction. He began to talk to her, but found her too deeply engaged with her own thoughts to give him much of her attention. Thinking, therefore, that his conversation might be only an annoyance, he ceased, and taking up a book, began to read. He had not, however, been long thus engaged, when Miss Hartley, who would not attend to him before, now seemed anxious to draw him into conversation. She cast several glances at his book, but Lacy did not seem to observe her, and read on in silence.

“Is that poetry?” said she, at last, finding that looks were of no avail.

“No; humble prose,” said Lacy, “and of no very amusing kind.”

“You like poetry best?” said Miss Hartley, inquiringly.

“I hardly know,” replied Lacy; “perhaps it does give me most pleasure at the time; but I should no more wish to read only poetry, than to live upon nothing but peaches.”

“Very true,” said Miss Hartley, as if she was not thinking about it; “and whose poetry is the best?”

“That is a question of mere taste, which nine persons out of ten might answer differently. To be sure, there are some few poets whom all would probably agree in classing among the first. Milton is one of them.”

“Ah!—yes. Milton—he wrote *Paradise Lost*. What a pity it is that *Paradise Lost* is so shocking!”

“Do you think it shocking?” replied Lacy, with a smile.

“Yes; it is all about—devils,” said she,

lowering her voice at the last word, as if she thought it hardly a proper one.

“Nay ; not all,” said Lacy. “There is something about angels, too.”

“Is there? well, I read almost two whole *cantos*, and it seemed to be all about devils. I was told it was quite a proper book, but I did not like to go on with it. It is not the sort of reading I prefer.”

“And what sort do you prefer?” said Lacy, who anticipated some amusement from her opinions.

“Oh dear ! I hardly know how to tell you ; —yes, I think I like poetry that has more heart and feeling in it, and seems more natural and simple, and comes more home to one, and describes thoughts, and ideas, and situations that might happen to be one’s own.”

“Like those in the *Corsair* and the *Bride of Abydos*?” said Lacy, casting his eyes upon a volume of Byron which lay on the table.

“Yes ; that sort of thing,” she answered,

very innocently, and with rather a hurried air, took up the book, as if in the hope that it would help her to arrange her thoughts. "Ay, it is all very beautiful," she continued, after she had turned over the leaves, abstractedly, for a few moments; "but that is not what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Whatever it may be, I am all attention," said Lacy.

"Are you? Ah! but now don't look so, and put on that sort of smile, as if you thought it was to be something amusing; indeed, I am going to be serious."

"And so am I; but you must give me time."

A short period of silence followed, which seemed to be employed by Miss Hartley in considering what she should say, as it was by Lacy in ruminating upon the singularity of her manner. She had, apparently, something to communicate, that she found a great difficulty in uttering, and she had been endeavouring to lead to it gradually and indirectly, and to gain cou-

rage by talking, till she could at length glide, without effort, into the midst of her agitating communication. This attempt had failed, and the Genius of Poetry, though so ably invoked, had refused to assist her. Apparently, however, she could find no aid in any other quarter, for, after a short consideration, she returned to her former topic.

“We were talking,” said she, “about poetry, and you asked me what kind I preferred; and I told you I liked that which had most feeling in it. Now, I dare say, you wonder at my taste, but the reason why I like that kind is, because I think it teaches one to know one’s own sentiments, and—and to describe them—and—and that is so difficult!” As she said this, she blushed, and uttered a very gentle sigh.

“Excuse me if I differ from you,” said Lacy, rather surprised at the course which the conversation was taking; “but I think that poetry of a highly-coloured and romantic class, indeed I may almost say, poetry in general, is rather likely

to cause one to mistake the nature of one's sentiments, than to improve the knowledge of them ; and, as for describing them, I question whether the expressions of a poet, however natural, and just, and forcible, are ever such as one should use in speaking of one's feelings to another, or even in writing to a friend."

"Very true ; I dare say you are right, and that is what makes it so difficult, for us especially ; there are so many things that women cannot say."

"Undoubtedly," replied Lacy, with increasing surprise ; "there are many things which they cannot say—which they ought not to say."

"Ought not—ay, that is what perplexes one.—Do you think," she added, hesitatingly, and with greater agitation of manner, "that it can ever be proper and allowable for women to express themselves—I mean—I hardly know how to ask you—may they ever speak upon such a subject as their—their affections?"

She coloured and hung down her head as she

uttered these words, and Lacy was scarcely less embarrassed.

“Strange !” thought he, “what can this tend to ? Surely she will not make me a declaration of love !”

The import of her words, when he took into consideration all that he had been told of the state of her feelings, seemed to countenance this supposition; and Lacy, with all his curiosity, was by no means anxious for such an *éclaircissement*. “Really,” said he, “I feel very incapable of answering you ; I should be rather presumptuous if I made myself a judge of the niceties of female conduct. I am sure you are more able to solve these difficulties than I can be. My opinion would not be worth your having.”

“Oh, I am sure your opinion is always very valuable to me.”

“You do it too much honour to say so : it will always be at your service, when it can be of any avail. I am afraid,” he added, forcing a

smile, "in this instance, you would not find it of much use: I don't pique myself upon being a good casuist upon any point, especially upon one that does not rightfully belong to me."

Lacy then changed the topic, and prevented all chance of a recurrence to the former one, by speedily quitting her presence.

Lacy was perplexed and annoyed by the past interview; it removed the last veil of doubt which, thin as it was, had still comforted him with some show of uncertainty with respect to Miss Hartley's unfortunate attachment. But now the fact was ascertained, and how was he to meet it? He could not requite her affections; he could not fly her presence; he could not bear to blight her passion by unkindness.

In this state of perplexity he was accosted by his mother, who was glorying in that same conviction, which was causing such torment to her unhappy son.

"Well, Herbert, where is Charlotte?" were Lady Lacy's first words.

“The eternal subject!” murmured Herbert, despondingly; “I don’t know, Ma’am,” he answered, drily.

“Don’t know! Ah, Herbert, what would Charlotte have said, if I had asked her where you were?”

“I really cannot pretend to say,” replied he, rather irritably; “pray don’t expect me to answer for Miss Hartley?”

“Well, I won’t; but now don’t look so angry, especially as you are talking about poor Charlotte. I am afraid you are unkind to her.”

“Unkind! my dear mother, never! at least I am sure if I have, it has been quite unintentionally—I always wished to show her every possible civility.”

“Ay, ay! but that won’t do—it is past civility—you must show a great deal more now; indeed you must.”

“Must!—ma’am, why?”

“Oh, I am confident you must. You know

you cannot draw back—if people raise expectations, they ought to satisfy them.”

“Undoubtedly, *if* they raise them—but I—”

“Oy yes, indeed you have raised them; at times you have been very attentive, and in public too, which made it more marked: you were so during the races—I don’t remember whether or not at the Westcourt ball—you did not seem well at that Westcourt ball; but at the race ball, I noticed particularly, you were very attentive to her, and she looked so happy, poor thing!”

“I am very sorry, ma’am,—”

“Sorry! that she was happy?”

“Yes—if it arose from a delusion.”

“Delusion, my dear Herbert! it is all delusion when people are in love.”

“I believe it is, too often,” said Herbert, whose thoughts returned to his own disappointment.

“Oh, yes; but now, Herbert, I cannot think it would be right in you to do every thing you

can to gain the poor thing's affections, and then to turn your back upon her."

"Ma'am, I assure you, I have no such uncivil intentions; but I really don't know what is the everything that I have done to gain Miss Hartley's affections."

"Oh, Herbert, many things—I cannot describe them—but it was your manner, my dear, your manner. Others saw it as well as me, particularly at that ball: you know you danced with her twice, and you talked to her a great deal, and now you are always with her; and you have been wounded; and, what with one thing or another, I don't wonder that it turns out as it has: you know I always said I thought she liked you."

No more was said at the time, but Herbert thought long and anxiously on the subject.

"Fool that I have been!" said he to himself, in the bitterness of self-reproach, "to have been so blind to my own conduct; so little conscious of what I was doing. It seems then, that I have

ensnared against my will, the affections of a person whose attachment I can never return, and I have done this so pointedly, that my conduct and its tendency were visible to many. I remember that fatal ball. I was galled by the coldness of one whom I ought to have avoided, instead of courting her attention, like a madman as I was. I ought to have profited by her noble example; but I was piqued and irritated, and tried to cover my chagrin under false gaiety and attention to others; and *then* I raised false expectations — yes, it is fit it should have been *then*. It was a moment of shameful folly and forgetfulness, and it has brought its just and bitter consequences. I have deceived Charlotte Hartley, and I must repair the wrong: my hand is all that I can give, and I will give it. I can never feel any love for her; but I will be very kind to her, and—I must forget Agnes, if I can.”

CHAPTER XV.

Your virtues, gentle master,
Are sanctified and holy traitors to you.

As You Like It.

IN this state of mind, he sought the counsel of his sister, whom he wished to make the depository of his sorrows, and perhaps the medium of his intended sacrifice. He found her a willing confidant; indeed, she was secretly a joyful one; she found that the important moment had arrived, and that it only remained for her to strike the blow that was to crown her plans with success.

She listened to Herbert's communication with much appearance of affectionate interest.

"My dear brother," said she, when he had

ended, "I sincerely regret the unfortunate course which circumstances have taken; nor do I entertain the slightest doubt that they are as we fear. It is as certain that Charlotte is attached to you, as that you are not attached to her. I am afraid too, that it is equally certain, that you (though unintentionally) have encouraged that attachment; indeed you are conscious of it yourself: your own honourable feelings have already dictated the only ample reparation."

"Yes," said Lacy, mournfully, "I know the sacrifice that I ought to make, and I now wish to ask you to be the bearer of my proposals. I know it is a singular request; but I cannot play the suitor myself: I should only distress her by my coldness, and betray the secret of my real indifference. Will you grant me this favour?"

His sister hesitated. "I would willingly do this, and more for you," said she; "but let us first be certain that it is necessary. Herbert, I

may safely say to you that I like this match almost as little as you do yourself. I should wish to see you married, but not to Charlotte. I will say it, though she is my husband's sister. She is a good girl, and I dare say would prove an amiable and conformable wife ; but she is not such to *you*. There is too great a difference in your minds ; they would have nothing in common—in fact I know you despise her.”

“ ‘ Despise ’ is a harsh word.”

“ Yes, but not the less true. Let us be honest—it is no time, my dear brother, for me to be picking phrases when your happiness is at stake. Your's and Charlotte's would be an unequal marriage, and I am sure that all such marriages are more or less productive of unhappiness, whatever the inequality be—whether of age, rank, fortune, or mind. You could never make a companion of Charlotte, nor could she appreciate you as you deserve. There would be little communion or confidence, and without confidence a married life must be one of misery.”

“ I see it, and feel it bitterly,” said Herbert, in a tone of despair ; “ but pray spare me this prospect, unless you can do anything to remedy the evil.”

“ I trust I can. I should not have spoken unless I had some hopes of assisting you. With every wish that you should do what is right, I cannot think that an immediate offer of marriage is necessary. Charlotte is certainly much attached to you ; but she is of such a disposition that I think she would be quite satisfied with a continuance of the brotherly and sisterly footing on which you now associate, if she could be assured that it was lasting, and that she should not be supplanted by any one else. She has a very reasonable diffidence in her power of fixing your affections, and a considerable jealousy of disposition ; and I think if this was appeased by any declaration on your part—by an engagement, let us say—by a proposal of marriage at some distant, unspecified period—I think there would then be some ground for hope, that in

time her attachment would be so far cooled, that you might withdraw yourself with perfect ease, and without any violence to her feelings."

Herbert's countenance alternately brightened and clouded over at this proposal.

"If you tell me," said he, "that such an engagement would be satisfactory to Miss Hartley, I am sure I can believe you, for I do not think you would speak without sufficient grounds; and I am sure that any such postponement will be a great relief to me: but I do not know how I can frame such a proposal. How can I seem at once anxious and reluctant—to wish the marriage, and not to wish it?"

"Leave that to me. You know you have asked me to bear your proposals, and I have undertaken the office. There are no difficulties of any moment."

"But," said Herbert, "I don't quite like the idea of making an engagement which is not to be fulfilled. It seems deceitful."

"My dear Herbert, you deceive yourself. It

is to be fulfilled—provisionally—it is to be fulfilled at some future time, in case that she should still continue to testify the same feelings. I cannot for an instant suppose that you have any intention of withdrawing from your contract, or that you would scruple to fulfil it, if you saw that nothing less sufficed to satisfy her mind.”

“ You do me no more than justice,” replied Herbert.

“ Of that I am sure,” said his sister. “ But if you wish to put the proposal upon a different footing, I think I can arrange it, so as to spare you the pain of feeling that the marriage is deferred solely by yourself. I will say generally that you wish to consider yourself engaged to Charlotte until she may choose to dissolve the engagement. Yes, yes, it shall be so. I am sure *that* will be satisfactory. Nay, it will show even more consideration for her, by placing the liberty of retracting solely in her power. It will effectually relieve her from the dread of

being supplanted by any one else, and that, to her timid mind, is the chief source of anxiety. The engagement will subsist for a while, till at last it is quietly dissolved, without surprise or sorrow to either of you. As for the delay of your marriage, there will be nothing in that to excite astonishment, or require explanation. Marriages are constantly deferred, without any but the parties concerned knowing why. Law and a thousand family arrangements may intervene to delay a marriage, and who knows the particulars, or would even have the patience to hear them? No—the fact of an engagement is all that the gossiping public care about. The time is comparatively immaterial. But I must perform my mission, while it is fresh in my mind. Farewell for the present: you shall soon hear the result of my negotiations.”

That result he soon heard, and he was told that it was very satisfactory; that Miss Hartley had received the communication with all proper blushing confusion, and that though she had said

little to the purpose, she had looked everything that she ought. To Lady Lacy, the result of this long cherished affair, proved not entirely agreeable; and it required a good deal of dexterous management on the part of Mrs. Hartley to prevent her from destroying that state of neutrality in which, through her ingenuity, the parties had been placed. Neither Sir William Lacy nor Charles Hartley contributed any visible influence. The former refused to give any attention to the subject, merely saying, that Herbert might act precisely as he felt inclined. As for the latter, he was quite contented to adopt, without inquiry, any opinion his lady might express.

Mrs. Hartley reviewed the circumstances with all the complacency of a successful plotter. She had succeeded in fixing upon her brother and sister-in-law, a yoke which she trusted might keep them long unmarried. She could not feel any certainty of the long continuance of the present safeguard; but it was something gained;

and let it only exist for a few years, and she trusted that such habits of celibacy would be formed as it would be no very difficult matter to perpetuate. Let them only remain single, and their fortunes, at their death, would centre in her children: at least she had every reason to hope that, with proper management, such might be the result. One of the two, she flattered herself, could hardly escape her toils. She was most anxious about her brother, for Charlotte's fortune was small in comparison with his expectations, and she felt that over him she possessed a very limited controul.

Notwithstanding her pretences, shew as by no means convinced that Charlotte was attached to Herbert, and she felt that she was grossly deceiving him in assuming that conviction. The cruelty of the imposition which she had practised, and the engagement into which she had led him, also struck her with a momentary pang. But she tried to stifle these upbraidings of her conscience, by a false persuasion of duty. "If

it is an injury to some," said she to herself, "it is for the benefit of others, that are still dearer to me. I do it for the good of my children. Surely their welfare should be the first object of a mother."

This was mere sophistry, and she knew it—yet it seemed to afford some satisfaction. To whom is sophistry not welcome in cases such as these? It is the universal panacea of guilt; and like an opiate, is greedily received as a soothing balm, by those who still know it to be poison.

CHAPTER XVI.

A popular license is indeed the many-headed tyrant.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THREE months now passed without the occurrence of any event that tended to produce a material alteration in the situation of the parties already mentioned. The engagements of Agnes to Sackville, and of Lacy to Miss Hartley, still continued in undiminished force. The only changes that did take place, were slow and progressive. Lacy gradually regained his strength, Sackville's visits became less frequent, Mr. Morton suspended his inquiries, and the intercourse between the families at Lacy and Dodswell, seemed likely to become as cold and slight as it had been before.

Mr. Morton's manner had received an unfortunate change. He was out of spirits, and was grave and more than usually irritable, and seemed to have been soured by adverse circumstances. Some traced these appearances to the duel; while others, with more truth, hinted at the possible derangement of his affairs. This latter opinion, however, was not justified by any alteration in his state of living, or the retrenchment of previous expences. It was rather to be collected from the uneasiness and impatience which he occasionally manifested, when any word was dropped in his presence, that had a reference to expenditure or retrenchment, and the anxious look with which he seemed to inquire, whether anything contained in the expression was levelled at him.

It was about four months after the duel, and early in the ensuing year, that the public were informed of the sudden death of one of the representatives of the borough of Wichcombe. Wichcombe was a close borough, the nomination

to which was shared by Lord Rodborough, with a wealthy commoner. The gentleman who died, had been Lord Rodborough's nominee; and his sudden decease, which Lord Rodborough protested to be very inconvenient, reduced him to the immediate necessity of looking out for some other person to fill that situation. His two sons were already in parliament, and so were most of his relations; and, after much consideration, he could think of no person so apparently eligible to such a post as Mr. Morton. He could not hope that he would be quite so subservient as the late member, who, having no sort of political opinion himself, implicitly followed every hint of his patron: but Mr. Morton was the father-in-law of Lord Malvern, and a man well known to the world; and was a very natural, and respectable object of choice.

The proposal was made, and, as it was dexterously done, in a manner flattering to Mr. Morton's pride, he readily acceded to it. Perhaps it would be unfair to inquire whether he

was actuated by the prospect of obtaining the personal security afforded by the privilege of parliament. The question of expenses was afterwards to be discussed; and it was treated by Mr. Morton with an affected carelessness, and an impatience, which did not escape the keen observation of Lord Rodborough's agent. He was probably induced to take advantage of it, for he proposed and obtained the singular conditions, that though the whole of the slight expenses of an uncontested election should be borne by Lord Rodborough, yet, that in the event of a contest, he should contribute only a half, and that the remainder should be borne by Mr. Morton.

However, as no contest was then in prospect, it seemed as if such an agreement might be made with perfect safety; and Mr. Morton, having once consented to stand for the borough, did not like to retract upon a mere point of expense. Whether the truth was known to the agent of Lord Rodborough, is more than we can venture

to say ; but, certainly at that time, a contest was more than merely probable. The late member, though enjoying a reasonable share of personal popularity, had excited discontent, by his maintenance of principles which were at variance with those of the majority of his constituents ; and, as his principles (if they might be so called) were known to be precisely those of Lord Rodborough, it was to be apprehended that the same were to be looked for in any fresh member of his appointment. Many of the burghesses had expressed considerable discontent at the state of thralldom in which they were held, and the present vacancy was thought a desirable opportunity for asserting their rights to the liberty of choosing for themselves.

The result of their deliberations, was a determination to seek immediately a champion for their cause ; and, on the day following Mr. Morton's acceptance of the proposals of Lord Rodborough, a deputation was on its way to Lacy Park, for the object of inviting either Sir

William or his son, to undertake the representation of the Borough of Wichcombe, and holding out, at the same time, flattering prospects of easy success. The result of the negotiations between Lord Rodborough and Mr. Morton, was not, at that time, made known, nor had the little *fronde* of non-conforming burgesses, made any formal signification of their measures previous to that very day. Sir William Lacy and his son, were, therefore, in complete ignorance of the part undertaken by Mr. Morton.

For himself, Sir William declined the offer of the burgesses, but expressed a wish that his son might be accepted in his stead; and Herbert, in accordance with the wishes both of his father and of the deputation, consented to undertake the charge. His sentiments coincided with those of his inviters, and he felt that he could, with honour and consistency, become their representative. With every proper feeling of humility, he was also conscious that he had sufficient talent to do justice to their confidence,

and to obtain some credit to himself: and he possessed that energy of character, which rendered the prospect of honourable exertion rather agreeable, than unpleasing to him. In politics he was not a bigot or an enthusiast. He was neither a humble worshipper of power, nor a heated admirer of the principles of republicanism. He was liberal in the truest sense, for he was willing to find, in every system, some admixture of good; and, with all proper abhorrence of that which was faulty, he was, fortunately, exempt from that angry intolerance with which the profession of liberality is too often accompanied.

The printed addresses of Lacy and Mr. Morton came out on the same day. They contained little more than a brief expression of the hopes and intentions of the respective candidates, and scarcely entered into any exposition of their political sentiments. It soon, however, came to be understood that little diversity would exist between them, except on one question—that of

Catholic Emancipation. Lacy was known to be favourable to it; Mr. Morton, as the nominee of Lord Rodborough, was concluded to be adverse.

Much surprise, and some feeling of repugnance and regret, were testified by each of the candidates, on finding to whom they were to be opposed. They felt that they were unpleasantly situated; and that their present opposition coming so soon after their duel, and being their first public act that succeeded it, would seem to argue a degree of confirmed hostility, which they were, each of them, far from entertaining. It may easily be imagined, that Lacy was sensibly grieved at the prospect of further dissension with the father of Agnes; nor was Mr. Morton altogether without some compunctious visitings, on finding himself again the opponent of one whom he felt that he had injured.

But neither of them could now retract. Mr. Morton was pledged to Lord Rodborough, and Lacy to the Wichcombe burgesses; and, though

he could perhaps have convinced them privately of the propriety of his wishes for retiring, he had no such plea as he could safely publish to the world, or which would not be exposed to malicious and discreditable interpretations. He wrote a short and amicable letter to Mr. Morton, declaring his entire freedom from all remains of hostile feeling; his ignorance of the fact of having him for an opponent, until he was pledged beyond possibility of receding; and his hope, that the situation in which they were now placed, would be attended with no unfavourable change of sentiment.

The answer from Mr. Morton was expressed in handsome terms, and was quite satisfactory to the feelings of Lacy; and here their communication ceased, each being sensible that they had a duty to fulfil towards their supporters, which forbade them to excite in their minds the suspicion of a collusive intercourse, and of any disposition to secret coalition, and to a barter of the public duty which they had undertaken

at the shrine of their own private friendship. The canvass was commenced, and as the number of electors was small, it was soon completed ; and each candidate, strong in promises of support which seemed to ensure to each a majority, calmly awaited the opening of the contest.

At length, the day of nomination arrived. The show of hands was pronounced to be in favour of Mr. Morton, and Lacy immediately demanded a poll. The poll was opened, and the modern Saturnalia began.

An election is a spectacle calculated to inspire an Englishman at once with pride and shame. For the entertainment of feelings of shame and disgust, there is assuredly ample ground. The rancour, the prejudice, the corruption, the hypocrisy, the most open venality disgustingly coupled with an affectation of principle and public spirit, and the exercise of a legal right brought into immediate connection with an unblushing breach of the established law—these are among

the many traits that justify such an unfavourable feeling. But there is also much wherein to exult, not only in contemplating the constitutional advantages and the dissemination of general confidence which must result from the exercise of such a right, but in considering that however great may be the disorders which accompany it, and seem almost to neutralize its benefits, those disorders can be safely permitted ; that there is a vigorous elasticity in the organization of the system which enables it to regain its course unhurt ; that the apparently disunited links of the great chain which extends in nice gradation from the beggar to the monarch, are restored unbroken to their original connection ; and that when the tumult has subsided, not a particle is found to have been dissolved of that finest fabric of human society that the world has ever seen.

The contest was attended with most of the circumstances by which contests are generally characterized. Processions, swelled by a rabble

who had no other means of taking a part in the election than by increasing its riot, paraded the streets in rival parties, bearing colours and flags, and headed by discordant bands of tipsy musicians. "Lacy and Independence," was the rallying cry of one party; and "Morton and Constitution," "Church and King," and "No Popery," were the watch-words of the other; and by dint of these, and the united flow of all the tap-rooms in Wichcombe, they were animated into a spirit of contentious valour which called more than once for the interposition of the authorities of the place.

The danger of a broken head did not extend, as is sometimes the case, to the candidates themselves; but they could not, of course, escape the usual infliction of election squibs. Bibs, leading-strings, and horn-books were exhibited in derision of Lacy's youth; and "Old iron to sell!" was the annoying cry which frequently greeted the appearance of Mr. Morton. It had been the aim of each candidate, and particu-

larly of Lacy, to avoid every symptom of personal hostility, and soften by a show of courtesy in public the menacing appearance of their respective positions. It therefore became to him a matter of no slight uneasiness, when he found that his supporters were but too ready to attribute to him all the coarse rancour which they were pleased to exhibit towards those of the opposite party, and that they indulged in broad public allusions to the circumstances of the duel. So interesting a fact, when once adverted to, was not likely to be allowed to slumber. Some pugnacious spirits began to flatter themselves with a hope of the contest being graced with the *éclat* of another meeting. The genius of poetry presently lent its aid; and on the third morning of the poll, rival ballad-singers were chaunting in doggeel rhyme their perverted accounts of the duel of the candidates.

Under these unpleasant circumstances did Lacy meet his opponent on the hustings on the third morning of the poll. He knew not in

what respect Mr. Morton was affected by the expressions of the populace, but he thought there was something more than usually chafed and haughty in his manner. This, however, could make no alteration in the sentiments of Lacy, or in the line which he meant to pursue. He felt that he owed him no further explanation, but that whatever he might say respecting their mutual situation, should be addressed less to him than to the public. He felt that some correction of their erroneous opinions was desirable; and, accordingly after a few remarks upon the state of the poll, and some political topics which had been previously adverted to, he proceeded to address them as follows:—

“ And now, gentlemen, allow me to turn for a few moments to circumstances of a private nature, circumstances which concern not only myself, but my honourable opponent also; and which I should therefore not feel justified in publicly mentioning if they had not already, and in a manner painful to my feelings, and doubt-

less to his, been obtruded upon your notice. I allude, gentlemen, to the hostility which at one time existed between Mr. Morton and myself. I have seen with pain that an impression is prevalent that it still exists; and I now address you in the hope of removing that impression, by distinctly assuring you that all such hostility has ceased. It ceased from the moment of our meeting; in me it has never been renewed, and I have the pleasure of thinking that no returning spark of it has actuated any part of the subsequent conduct of my honourable opponent.

“ I am unwilling, gentlemen, that any one here present should think so meanly of me as to suppose that feelings of private resentment can enter into the motives of my present course. When I first aspired to the honour of being your representative, it was in the perfect ignorance of who my opponent might be, or whether any would present himself. I undertook the charge in the conviction that you had a right

to contend for an independent vehicle of your sentiments; and I feel that I should be disgracing that good cause, if I were to admit the unworthy influence of private pique.

“Mr. Morton hears me, but I address this avowal solely to you. That gentleman, I am well persuaded, stands in no need of such an explanation. My sentiments are already known to him, and it is in his power to corroborate my present statement. I am confident that our private feelings are and will be as strictly amicable as our public conduct will be that of honour; and in the assurance of this, and in the presence of you all, I here offer him my hand.”

Loud acclamations followed the close of this address. Mr. Morton took the proffered hand, and in a frank and cordial manner briefly expressed his entire approval and unqualified confirmation of Lacy's words. Mr. Morton then repaired from the hustings to a dinner, attended by most of the principal electors. He was in good spirits in spite of the unpromising results

of the poll, cheered apparently by the manly and amicable declaration of his opponent, with whom the appearance of a returning state of hostility had begun to weigh heavy on his mind.

The sitting was long and jovial; all were of one party and of one mind; and as there was nobody present to contradict any of their assertions, they soon found themselves in a condition to talk their opponents out of every possible chance of success. Healths were drunk, and thanks returned, and a profusion of high-sounding truisms were the customary result.

In the midst of this joyous career, when the uproar of a "Three times three" had nearly subsided, and the glasses were still jingling on the table, a servant entered and put a small note into the hand of Mr. Morton. He opened it carelessly, but no sooner had he cast his eyes upon the contents than he turned pale, his lips quivered, his hand trembled, and he sat the picture of embarrassment and dismay. In ano-

ther moment he had torn it, and thrown it into the fire, replied only with a glance of anger to the "No bad news, I hope, Sir?" of an honest burgess near him, whispered to the gentleman at his side a request that he would take his place, and then, after a scarcely articulate apology for leaving the company, he rose and hastily quitted the room. A dead silence followed his departure, and curiosity and consternation were painted in the countenances of all present. At length curiosity so far triumphed as to induce them to commission one of their number to make inquiries, and to see Mr. Morton, if possible. He returned with the information that Mr. Morton was writing, and would not be disturbed. They soon learnt that a messenger was dispatched to Lord Rodborough, and shortly afterwards, that Mr. Morton himself was on his way to Dodswell.

CHAPTER XVII.

That which gilded o'er his imperfections
Is wasted and consumed, even like ice,
Which, by the vehemence of heat, dissolves
And glides to many rivers ; so his wealth
That felt a prodigal hand, hot in expense,
Melted within his gripe, and from his coffers
Ran, like a violent stream, to other men's.

COOKE.—*Green's Tu Quoque.*

WE shall now transfer our readers to Dodswell, and prepare them, by a recital of previous circumstances, for the arrival of Mr. Morton. The only persons then at Dodswell were Lady Louisa, Agnes, and her younger sister Marianne; Lord and Lady Malvern were visiting in another county, and Sackville, fifty miles off, at his own place. Mr. Morton, since the opening of the poll, had been staying at Wichcombe, from

whence he had transmitted to his family daily accounts of the progress of the election. Lady Louisa was as much interested as she could be with any thing beyond the imaginary vicissitudes of her own tardy convalescence, and could but little sympathize with the anxiety of Agnes, who paid an earnest attention to the contest, and saw, in the present opposition of her father and Lacy, continual grounds for apprehension.

It was in the afternoon of the day on which we have seen Mr. Morton so abruptly quit the company of his supporters, that Agnes was sitting alone at Dodswell, in a room, the projecting window of which, commanded a view of the shrubbery, and of a private door which led to it from the house. The short winter's day was drawing to a close, and as the shades began to darken, she looked out with a corresponding spirit of gloom at the cheerless prospect. In so doing, she observed three men of ordinary appearance, enveloped in great coats, and with riding whips in their hands, pass along the

shrubby walk, and after looking about them for a moment, enter at the private door. She was struck with the unusual unceremoniousness of their mode of entrance, but knowing that electors, in the time of a contest, are apt to dispense with ordinary rules, she immediately conceived them to be three of the independent burgesses, who were bent upon showing their attachment to liberty and their candidate, by making his house their own. Under this persuasion, and anxious to receive the latest accounts of the progress of the election, she rang, and desired to know what report the persons who had just arrived had brought from Wichcombe. It was long before the servant returned with an answer to this inquiry, and when he did come, it was evident by his mysterious looks and troubled manner, that he was not the bearer of agreeable tidings.

He said they were not from Wichcombe; he could not pretend to say exactly from whence they came; he could not be quite sure whether

they wanted his master ; he hoped not, but he supposed they would stay till he returned.

“ This is very strange,” thought Agnes, struck both by the words and manner of the speaker, and feeling her apprehensions rapidly increase. “ Something unpleasant has happened,” said she to the servant, “ and you do not like to inform me of it. Speak, boldly—I can bear to hear it. Who are these people ? ”

“ Well, then, Ma’am, if I must speak—they are the bailiffs ; ” and then came out the whole truth—there was an execution in the house.

Agnes did not scream or faint, though the shock was one of the greatest she had experienced. She sat in pale, agitated silence, listening to the information which the servant, after the removal of the first awful difficulty, was perfectly willing to give. It appeared that the writ was issued at the suit of a man, whose brother-in-law was a burgess of Wichcombe, and voted against Mr. Morton.

Informed of this, Agnes, without delay, dis-

patched a messenger to her father, with that note which had summoned him so abruptly from the presence of his supporters. She then turned her attention to the distressing question of the course she should adopt with respect to her mother, and doubted whether she should immediately inform Lady Louisa of what had occurred, or conceal the fact till the arrival of Mr. Morton. A short consideration induced her to attempt the latter course. She dreaded the moment when the truth should be made known to her. She was aware that the shock would be more severe to Lady Louisa, than it had been to herself. She had long suspected the derangement of her father's affairs, though it was a subject on which she had never dared to speak, even to the extent of hinting at the desirableness of economy. But Lady Louisa had no such suspicions, nor would it have been easy to inspire her with them, for though not of a cheerful temperament, she had that timidity of character which induced her

ever to shut her eyes to alarming truths; and her passiveness was allied rather to indolence, than to that stoical composure that would fit her to bear the blow with firmness.

The kind and judicious plans of Agnes, with a view to spare her the pain of a hasty discovery, were unhappily frustrated. She had been prematurely informed, through the babbling imprudence of her favourite attendant; and Agnes, on entering her room, had the pain of seeing her sink down in a fit under the shock of the first discovery. She soon recovered her senses, and long were the distressing and unavailing lamentations which Agnes was doomed to hear; and frequent were the demands for explanations which she was not yet enabled to give. Lady Louisa, who considered it proper on so serious an occasion, to be more than usually ill, and thought herself unequal, even to the exertion of lying on a sofa, had retired early to rest, when Agnes was led to prepare for the approach-

ing interview with her father, who, she was told, had arrived, and desired to see her in his own sitting-room.

When she entered, Mr. Morton was sitting dejectedly at a table, his face concealed by the hand on which it rested. He gave a short side glance to ascertain who it was, and then, without uttering a word, or removing the hand that shaded his eyes, he extended to her the other. She took it in silence, and returned its tremulous, feverish pressure. He drew her towards him, and she rested her head upon his shoulder. It was a moment of bitter emotion, and the first tears which she had shed since she heard of this new calamity, now fell from her cheeks. He perceived them, and acknowledged, by a short and impressive embrace, this mark of her condolence, and then motioned her to sit beside him. He again took her hand, but some moments elapsed before he spoke.

“I need not tell you what has happened,” were his first words, “you know all—you know

that I am a beggar. I have suffered for years more than I can describe, for the sake of maintaining appearances, and this is the end of all my labours! and at what a time has the blow fallen!—in the midst of this election! Agnes, you look as if you would fain ask me why I engaged in that election—and well may you ask me! It was the desperate plan of a ruined man to hoodwink the world; to bolster up his falling credit; to gain a fresh claim to consideration, when he felt he was losing all his former ones. It was because I could not assign the true reason for a refusal, and because I wished to deceive even myself with the *éclat* of a little false prosperity; but did I?—no, no, no—Heaven only knows what I suffered; but now I am embarked, and I must still go on, if I can get the assistance I want. I have written to Lord Rodborough—I am anxious for his answer.”

Agnes looked at him earnestly, as if she wished to speak, but was almost fearful of addressing him. “I am your daughter,” said she,

“and I feel as if all I have ought to be yours. Under present circumstances, I can hardly wish the election to proceed ; but if you feel that your honour requires it, and I can command any money —”

“Thanks, thanks, my dear child, but you cannot assist me. Even if I had the wish (which I have not) to squander your fortune on myself, I could not do it without the consent of your trustees, and that would be, and ought to be withheld. Besides, they are at a distance, and immediate help is what I require.”

At this moment a letter was brought in—it was the answer from Lord Rodborough. Mr. Morton eagerly took it, and began to read it aloud to his daughter. It ran thus :

“My dear Sir,—I am much surprised and concerned at the contents of your note. Whatever my suspicions might have been, I had no idea that you were so far involved as you now confess yourself to be, and I cannot help thinking myself rather ill-used in not having been

made acquainted with the state of your circumstances, when you engaged to become my nominee for Wichcombe. I like openness on many accounts, and flatter myself that I am not altogether unworthy of being trusted. You are my candidate, and your defalcation will prove very inconvenient to me, as there is now no time to engage another. I am therefore inclined to make the best of a bad bargain, and must consequently desire ——". Mr. Morton could read no longer, but tore in pieces the insulting letter, and threw it into the fire.

"Insolent, selfish fool!" he exclaimed, with a countenance inflamed with indignation, "does he think me his slave? Gracious God! have I laboured for no better end than to be viewed in such a light as this? To what have I exposed myself! but I will not bear it another moment. No: Lord Rodborough's humble tool will be no longer subservient to his lordship's views—I give up the contest. Inconvenient to him! not one word of compassion for my misfortune!

Pshaw! compassion! what am I thinking of? thank God he did not offer it! I am insulted enough without it."

He then sat down, and wrote a short letter. It was to the returning officer of Wichcombe, stating that he declined the contest. He then commenced another, when Agnes, who feared that her presence might be irksome to him, rose, and was about to retire. He begged her to remain, and said that he was going to write very briefly to Lord Rodborough. This intimation was fortunate: Agnes looked at his irritated countenance, and approached him with an air of mild expostulation.

"My dear father," said she, "do not think me too bold, if I beg of you as a favour not to return an immediate answer to Lord Rodborough. You are angry with him, and very justly, but his rudeness may now appear to you deserving of a more severe notice than you may afterwards think it worthy of. He has no right

to expect so immediate a reply—pray defer it till to-morrow.”

Mr. Morton smiled, and pushed the paper from him. “You are quite right,” said he: “I was on the point of saying what perhaps I could not have reflected on with as much pleasure as I can on this,” and he laid his hand on the note that contained his resignation. He covered his eyes for a few minutes, as if engaged in thought, and then looked up with a composed and almost cheerful countenance. “How wonderful,” said Mr. Morton, “are the changes of one’s feelings under the trials of misfortune, and how beneficial to us oftentimes are seeming evils! You do not know the load that is taken off my mind. You could not conceive it, unless you were aware of what I have suffered during many years past—I feel like a prisoner let out of gaol—I am relieved at last from the terrible yoke of supporting false appearances. Oh, my dear daughter, if your poor father has seemed

too often harsh and capricious, attribute much of his waywardness to this curse that hung over him. Perhaps I ought not to plead it as an excuse, because I brought it on myself; but I am confident that many of the defects of temper, of which I am conscious, have been aggravated by my circumstances. Of all poisons to one's happiness, one of the most deadly, is a continual struggle to seem what one is not. Think what it must be to a person of honourable feelings, to be continually sensible that his whole conduct is a practical lie, and that he is endeavouring to affirm by deed, what he would scorn to utter in words—what he could not utter without exposing himself to one of the worst insults that a man can receive—yet this I did, and still felt that I had an equal right to resist the slightest impeachment of my honour. What a mere paradox is human conduct, if one could sift it to the bottom, and see all its contradictory motives! Now, at last, I seem to understand

myself. My real prosperity has long been gone : I am glad the bubble is gone too—Adversity seems to have already taught me to see clearer—perhaps I may be happier for it—I certainly should if I could think that I had hitherto endangered no happiness but my own—but I know too well what I have sacrificed.” His voice faltered, and he seemed to make an unavailing effort to proceed. He took his daughter’s hand, pressed it to his breast, and added, in a low tone, —“ I have sacrificed you.”

Agnes was startled and agitated by this sudden allusion to her own situation, and, for a while, was unable to answer. “ Do not think so,” said she at length, “ I shall always look upon Mr. Sackville as a very valuable protector ; and even if I cannot feel any very strong affection for him, I ought not to repine at being in such hands as his—besides—” she suddenly checked herself, and presently added, “ Yes, yes, I believe it is all for the best.” Her mind

was recurring to Lacy. Mr. Morton understood her thoughts, and forbore all further remark.

In spite of his self-congratulation at escaping from the trammels of a false assumption of wealth, Mr. Morton soon gave way to melancholy, on viewing the features of his new situation. It was plain that his former character and station in the world could be maintained no longer, and that he must henceforward be content to give up, not only the parade in which he had so long delighted, but the more praiseworthy enjoyment of the pleasures of an extensive society. Unfortunately, too, he had been but little accustomed to seek for social happiness in his own domestic circle. He could hardly be blamed for this, for the search promised little success. Lady Louisa was a dull companion; Lady Malvern had scarcely interested him more; and of Agnes, till within the last three years, he had never seen much. She was now his chief, and he might almost say, his only consolation; for

his youngest daughter was still but a child, and his sons were absent.

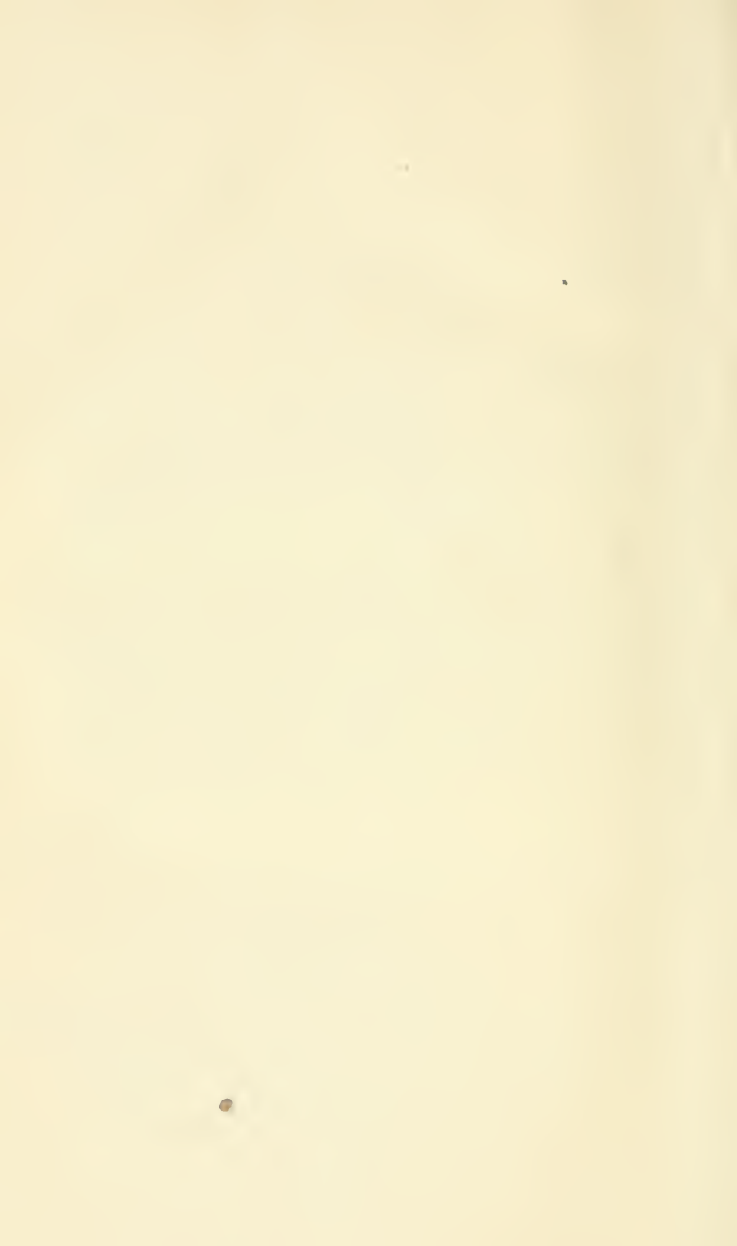
On Agnes now devolved the difficult though grateful task of administering that consolation, of which her parents seemed so much in need. She had been a bright ornament in their days of prosperity, but it was now that her value was most deeply felt. The gloom of their situation would have seemed intolerable, but for the cheering influence of that mental sunshine, which, harassed as she was by other sorrows, superadded to theirs, she could always diffuse around her. She was not only a zealous, but a judicious comforter—she did not press unavailing topics of consolation—she did not provoke to an indulgence in repining by seeming to underrate the extent of the misfortune—she acknowledged its magnitude, and at the same time showed that she could contemplate it without dejection—she never appeared solicitous to console, an appearance which must ever defeat the object ; but contrived that consolation should

seem to come unbidden, rather than to have been summoned by her ingenuity.

The first friend and adviser whom Mr. Morton called to his aid, was Sackville, to whom he wrote after his resignation of the contest, and begged for his immediate presence. Sackville was then at his country seat, at the distance of about fifty miles from Dodswell, and on the second day after the receipt of the letter, having forwarded an excuse for his delay, he joined the disconsolate party. In the mean time, we may pause to review the machinations of this dangerous and deceitful person.

END OF VOL. II.







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